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A BOMBURG BEAUTY.

A NOVEL.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

Author of "A CRACK COUNTY," "MATRON OR MAID," "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S HEART," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XX.

HIS SERENE HIGHNESS, PRINCE FRISKOVITCH.

ON the afternoon of Tuesday, August 3rd, the lawn-tennis ground presented a most brilliant and animated appearance. A ladies' tournament was going on, which had already lasted several days; and now, on the concluding one, the players who had been fortunate enough to vanquish their opponents, were pitted against each other.

From an early hour they had begun to play the ties off, and at five o'clock only two couples remained to fight for the pretty pair of gold bangles, generously presented to the victors by the Lawn Tennis Committee. Lots had been drawn for partners in the first instance, and, by some curious freak of Fortune, Hetty and Amelia found themselves destined to be together. Now, since the tea-party, Hetty had taken it into her head that her friend's affection showed symptoms of cooling. There was a shade of reserve—almost of displeasure—in Miss Dawkins' manner which both puzzled and distressed her. She was genuinely attached to Amelia, and racked her brains—though vainly—to think in what possible way she could have given her cause of offence. Had she been positively certain that a coolness was gradually springing up between them, she might, perhaps, have gathered sufficient courage to seize the bull by the horns, and boldly inquire the reason; but she refrained from taking this decisive step, partly through timidity, partly because she tried to delude herself into

the belief that she was mistaken, and that there existed no real alteration in Amelia's conduct. And if the whole thing were fancy, it would only make her—Hetty—appear extremely ridiculous. Therefore she determined to take no notice, and wait and see if Time confirmed her suspicions. Nevertheless, they rendered her nervous and ill at ease. It never occurred to her that North Penywern might be responsible for Amelia's more frigid demeanour, or that he had paid her a good deal of attention when Miss Dawkins was by. She regarded him so entirely as "Milly's young man," that he did not even enter into her calculations.

Women, as a rule, are excellent friends till a man comes between them. If Hetty had been less ignorant of the world, she would probably have known this fact. As it was, if anyone had told her Amelia was jealous, she would have laughed the idea to scorn. Under the circumstances, both girls would have preferred to have drawn a stranger in the tournament. But Fate had elected they were to be partners. Amelia's bright face grew a shade less bright, as she said: "You and I, Hetty? Isn't that odd? But I am afraid there is mighty little chance of our winning. I was in hopes I should have drawn Miss Morgan."

Miss Morgan was a young lady who played tennis particularly well. She and Amelia were the twin stars of the tennis ground, and their coalition would pretty nearly have ensured success. No other two fair aspirants for bangles could have stood up against them.

"I'm so sorry to spoil your chance," said Hetty contritely. "I wouldn't have done so for worlds. It's too provoking! Could I not pretend that I am ill, or have sprained my foot, and get out of playing? Then you might find some decent substitute."

Her humility conquered Amelia's temporary vexation, and made her feel ashamed of herself for having allowed it to appear.

"No, no," she rejoined, in her accustomed good-natured tone. 'We'll make a fair fight of it still. The only girl I'm really afraid of is Miss Morgan. But if she draws an indifferent partner, then we shall meet on tolerably even terms."

"Oh, Amelia," cried Hetty regretfully, "I do wish I were a better player. I always knew at school that I wasn't very clever—not clever like you, I mean—but I never realized what an utter fool I was until I came here."

"Nonsense," said Amelia kindly. "You're nothing of the sort."

And don't ever run yourself down, my dear, for that's the greatest act of folly any young woman can possibly commit. The world appraises her pretty much as she appraises herself. And as for lawn-tennis, it's all very well in its way, but it's not the Be-all nor End-all of existence. You play a good bit better than the majority, and every now and then, when in form, quite distinguish yourself at volleying."

"Do you really mean that?" asked Hetty, brightening at her friend's praise.

"Yes, else I should not say so. Now, since the Fates have thrown us together, what I propose is this. You are tall, and have a good long reach; therefore you shall stand at the net and take all the fairly easy balls, and I will guard the rest of the court to the best of my feeble ability. Thus, we shall make the most of our forces."

Hetty, whose veneration for Amelia was intense, obeyed these instructions literally. When they first stood up to play, she was very nervous and hardly did herself justice. They occupied, what she considered, an embarrassingly prominent position, and the ground was crowded with spectators, amongst whom were several well-known gentleman players, who freely criticised the fair performers. Consequently, their opponents won the opening game of the set. But soon Hetty warmed to her work, and becoming interested, lost the feeling of self-consciousness, which had so greatly impeded her actions. By-and-bye she performed such miracles of skill and agility as called forth Miss Dawkins' sincere commendation.

"Bravo, Hetty!" she exclaimed. "What has come to you? You are surpassing yourself."

They won the second game pretty easily, and after some excellent play on either side, finally succeeded in winning the set, thus disqualifying the losers from taking any further part in the tournament. They had been singularly fortunate, and were both surprised and elated by their continued success. Miss Morgan, owing to the extreme short-sightedness of her partner, was defeated the very first day of the contest. Amelia had become more and more hopeful after each hard-earned victory, and now there only remained the final tie to be played off.

Excitement was at its highest. Bets were being freely made amongst the male portion of the spectators, whose sympathies

for the most part sided with Beauty, as represented by Miss Dawkins and Miss Davidson, rather than with Rank and Dowdiness in the persons of the Hon. Mildred Magennon and Lady Elizabeth Mannering. The four girls, tired after their recent exertions, were taking a short rest on one of the benches, previous to recommencing play, and refreshing themselves by tea and iced milk and soda water.

It was a blazing hot day. The sun shone fiercely in a cloudless blue sky, and although one side of the court was in shadow, the other was still exposed to the full fury of its rays. They beat down in the eyes of the players and placed them at a considerable disadvantage. It was almost impossible to see the ball until it touched the ground at their feet. So great had been the heat of the last few days, that the grass, instead of being green and springy, had now become quite brown and slippery. Under the shady lime and chestnut trees where sat the spectators, the temperature was delightful; balmy and still as a real summer's day should be. Through the woven network of dark boughs and green foliage overhead, the blue sky gleamed cheerily, and sunbeams penetrating here and there danced tremulously upon the yellow path, and gilded it with flaming gold. And the ladies! who shall describe them, so fair, so lovely in their light summer frocks of pink and blue and white, relieved by striped flannel jackets, jaunty sailor hats, and all kinds of feminine conceits in the way of gloves, bows, parasols, etc. Sitting there *en masse*, they reminded one of a delicately-tinted flower-bed, gay with charming shades of colour.

The majority, be it whispered in strict confidence, had put on their best gowns, for it was pretty generally known, that His Serene Highness, Prince Friskovitch, had arrived at Homburg on the previous evening, that he had been met at the station by his devoted follower, Lord O'Banashee, that the distinguished traveller had dined with his happy Lordship, at the Parc Hotel, and intended honouring the lawn-tennis ground with his Serene and Gracious presence that very afternoon. Consequently, feminine hearts were all a-flutter. Each pretty and aspiring woman said to herself, in the depths of her innermost consciousness, "I'm looking very nice. I can't help knowing it, and if I have any luck, perhaps the Prince will think so also. These things are all opportunity. I only want a chance to get on, but

that's the difficulty, and the way the whole tribe of horrid, shameless women set their caps at him is disgraceful."

Right in front of the crowded benches, three wicker armchairs, lined with Turkey red cushions, still remained unoccupied. Not a few adventurous people had seated themselves therein, only to rise again quickly, when a polite protest from one in authority had been whispered in their ear. Many are the glances cast at those seemingly ordinary-looking chairs, for the public have become aware of the interesting fact, that those soft cushions are destined to be pressed by a Princely form. Ah! favoured cushions, and beautiful, ambitious ladies with charming heads full of all kinds of projects, and sparkling eyes, rendered bright by visions of aggrandizement. Who knows—who knows what may happen? Only luck is wanted; nothing more. Every other element of success is centred in your own fair persons.

Suddenly a mysterious stir takes place amongst the crowd. The tall Englishmen in white flannel, and the short Germans in light frock coats, that wrinkle round stout, substantial waists and emphasize their ample proportions, move on one side, leaving the centre of the path free. He comes! Like a conquering Hero, like a superior specimen of mankind, almost like a little Deity. All heads are turned, all eyes directed to the eagerly-awaited Prince. Yes, here he comes, pausing every now and again to bow affably to his numerous acquaintances. A tall, soldierly-looking man is his Highness, somewhere between thirty and thirty-five years of age, with curly hair, and a boyish twinkle in his dark brown eyes—eyes that betray his southern origin on the maternal side, and a wonderfully winning smile which gains him friends wherever he goes. A prince and a good fellow he looks every inch of him; a *bon viveur* and a *bon garçon*, who takes an optimistic view of life, and believes that man was placed in this world by a benevolent Creator, for the express purpose of enjoying himself and helping others to enjoy themselves also. For our Prince is no Diogenes. He likes to give pleasure as well as to receive it.

On one side of His Serene Highness walks the Hon. Mrs. Patman, elaborately dressed in a Parisian costume of great costliness, but eccentric taste. She is beaming, radiant. Her mignon face ripples over with smiles. Whenever her companion addresses the curtest remark to her, her joy, gratitude and appro-

bation appear to know no bounds. She laughs, she shows all her teeth—they are very pretty and white—and bows her head repeatedly in token of delight. On the Prince's left, marches Mrs. Crown-Shuffer, the well-known poetess, whose clever imitations of the Ingoldsby Legends are all the rage. Her frizzled golden hair renders her a conspicuous object, even amongst a crowd where frizzled golden hair is the fashion; but hers is so very golden, and so very, *very* frizzled, whilst her beautiful cheeks are lightened up by almost as many colours as a Turkey carpet. A white veil with black spots does good service, however, by toning down the whole. She wears a remarkably æsthetic and remarkably clinging yellow-green cashmere, with puffed sleeves, a short waist, and a deep lace frill round the neck. She looks as if she had borrowed a costume from one of Gilbert's operettas; but apparently she finds favour in her distinguished patron's eyes. Every now and then Mrs. Patman shoots an uncertain glance at this clever lady, who prides herself on scorning the conventionalities, and who has the reputation of being as gay as she is witty; but the dear little woman is quite safe. Between her dainty self and that daring creator of hazardous rhymes, which delight the Youth of the Period, the Princely person interposes itself and effectually dissipates any baneful contagion. His Serene Highness, indeed, acts as a perfect anti-septic. No reputation can suffer when he is there to shield it. The halo surrounding him envelops, for the time being, his associates, and smoothes away a surprising number of difficulties, otherwise unsmoothable. Close behind this interesting trio walked Lord O'Banashee, his Hibernian countenance exhibiting every symptom of unbounded satisfaction, and two gentlemen in plain clothes, who formed part of Prince Friskovitch's household.

His Highness advances slowly, bowing here, shaking hands there. Finally he seats himself in the centre chair of the three, and graciously motions to his two fair companions to do likewise. Mrs. Patman and Mrs. Crown-Shuffer, after executing a deep obeisance, typical of the loyal fervour of their feelings, gleefully obey the Princely bidding, proud in the consciousness that at this triumphant moment the eyes of all their female acquaintances are enviously fixed upon them. A friendly contest now takes place. Each lady endeavours to outdo the other by the smartness and piquancy of her remarks. The fair poetess appears to have the

advantage. Probably her sayings are more adventurous than the sprightly Australian belle's, and therefore more enjoyable. At all events, His Serene Highness's shoulders are seen to shake once or twice in a very hearty manner, and imperceptibly he edges his chair an inch or two nearer to that of the brilliant and amusing Mrs. Crown-Shuffer. Mrs. Patman's rival little remarks fall quite flat. She begins to feel the demon of jealousy and mortification springing up within her, and tells one or two unusually *risqué* stories, just because she is determined not to have her nose put out of joint by *that woman* !

She feels rather ashamed of herself, but they instantaneously recall her to favour, and place her on the same delightfully intimate terms as the fair Crown-Shuffer. The only difficulty she experiences, however, is to keep going on. A single spasmodic effort is quite within her powers, but a series comes rather hard. She has not had Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's practice, and once more relapses into silence, mentally anathematising the poetess, and detesting her for a bold, forward thing.

Meanwhile the whole bevy of ladies seated in His Serene Highness' rear, lean forward in order to enjoy the improving and gratifying sight of the Princely back, the Princely collar, and the Princely neck, shaded by the artistic parasol of Mrs. Crown-Shuffer. Whenever he turned his head the fraction of an inch he could not help being conscious of the agreeable fact that dozens of pretty, smiling eyes were gazing at him with a kindly interest and good-will impossible to mistake. It would be interesting to know whether, in his heart of hearts, he ever said to himself, "These dear little women are darlings, but they are the biggest toadies on the face of this earth." The probabilities are, however, that he forgave their small infirmities in return for the gratification he derived from them ; for to have hundreds of sweet, ambitious ladies dying to attract your notice, and staring at you, wherever you go, must be pleasing to a masculine creature, be he Prince or no Prince. At all events, the extreme geniality of His Highness' manner, when dealing with the fair sex, tended to confirm this supposition.

After the first excitement caused by Prince Friskovitch's arrival had subsided, the four girls adopted the manly expedient of tossing for the shady side of the court. Amelia and Hetty won the toss, their good-luck still sticking to them.

The quartette now stood up to recommence playing. The court assigned to them was some little way to the right of the chairs occupied by His Serene Highness and party. When the four slim figures stepped out on to the yellowing turf the Prince raised his eye-glass to his eye. Apparently they interested him, for a considerable time elapsed before he withdrew his gaze. Then he turned round sharply, and said to Lord O'Banashee, who, as usual, was close at hand :

"O'Banashee, you know everybody. That's why you're such good company. Tell me who that girl is."

"Which girl do you mean, sir?" asked his Lordship, with a beaming countenance. "Lady Elizabeth Mannering?"

"Oh! dear no, I know her. Good gracious, how can you have any doubt as to which girl I mean? I mean the pretty one, of course, with the lovely auburn hair, and the dark eyes like a gazelle. What is her name?"

"She is a Miss Davidson, sir. I got introduced to her, thinking you might admire her."

"Quite right, O'Banashee, quite right. Showed your usual *savoir faire*, and also that you have divined my taste. Davidson," he went on musingly; "I wonder what Davidson. Any relation to Lord Davidson, or the Davidsons of Ardnaglashiel?"

"I believe not, sir. This young lady's father is said to be a rich Manchester manufacturer, here for his health. The old people are terribly vulgar. Sort of people one could not possibly have anything to do with, but the girl is a nice pretty little thing in her way, quite unformed, and with no conversation, but still passable."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH HETTY AND AMELIA RUN A FAIR CHANCE OF GETTING THEIR HEADS TURNED.

"PASSABLE indeed!" exclaimed the Prince enthusiastically. "My dear fellow, your taste in woman-kind has become vitiated, just like a man who dines every night of his life off highly-flavoured dishes. Passable! Why she is simply the most exquisite creature I have seen for a long time. Women like that are better without conversation. It only spoils them. They are

meant to be gazed at, just as one would gaze at a beautiful statue. By-the-way, O'Banashee," abruptly.

"Yes, sir—can I be of any service to you?"

"You can go to those young ladies and tell them, with my compliments, that I request them as a favour to play their game in the court opposite to me. They are too far off, and it's fatiguing always having to keep one's eye-glass up." Prince Friskovitch had made England his home for so many years that he spoke English perfectly. His stout German wife, who was a good deal older than himself, and whom he had married from motives of expediency alone, was a kindly soul. She gave him a large amount of liberty and never complained, for she had the sense to recognise that because a man unites himself to one woman, it is absurd to expect he should not admire any other. She was an admirable Princess in everything save appearance, and welcomed the truant with open arms, whenever he chose to appear, which was not often, at her Castle of Khristianisberg in the Highlands of Bavaria. The consequence of this discreet conduct was that he always treated her with deference and courtesy.

Lord O'Banashee departed in haste, and delivered His Serene Highness' message, word for word, tacking on a few embellishments of his own, by way of adding to the general effect of the speech. It, however, was quite great enough without them.

The girls coloured up with pleasure. They looked at each other and smiled; then, giving the little scarlet-coated boys instructions to pick up the balls, transferred themselves and their racquets to the vacant court immediately in front of Prince Friskovitch. He bowed his head in token of acknowledgment, and they took their places without delay, for the afternoon was now far advanced. The game began, and soon the four young active figures were running about in every direction; volleying and serving, taking astonishing back-handers and really playing uncommonly well. It was a pretty sight. Hetty and Amelia, one in white, the other in pink, darting about with flushed cheeks, lithe forms, and sparkling eyes, were enveloped in a cool and grateful shade; whilst their opponents were illumined by the most brilliant sunshine, which turned everything that came within its scope into gold. On one side was the soft green gloom of the foliage, the subdued and restful light, the long, creeping shadows of late noon; on the other still burnt the fierce glare of

day in all its hot glory and magnificence, causing the grass, the trees, the girls themselves to shine with an amber radiance most pleasant to look at, but most exhausting to endure after many hours spent in severe physical exercise. Lady Elizabeth felt faint, and flagged in her play. Her companion, a fat, good-natured girl, had to do double duty, and tired accordingly. Moreover, she suffered from weak eyes, and the sun tried them severely. Nevertheless they made a gallant fight, for English girls are plucky, and do not give in lightly. Prince Friskovitch watched their proceedings with the keenest interest. He no longer addressed his companions, who sat discomfited by his side, but kept his eyes riveted on the players, or rather on Hetty, who appeared to have excited his admiration in no common degree.

Whilst all this was going on, Mrs. Davidson occupied a bench a few yards in the rear of His Serene Highness. She sat staring at him in a kind of solemn ecstasy, which deprived her of all sense of the passage of Time. One hour, two, three, it would have been the same to her. As she declared afterwards, she could have sat there gazing at the Princely back for ever.

"John," she kept whispering to her husband in tones of awe-struck admiration, "did you ever see such back hair in your life? Isn't it beautiful? The way it curls upon his neck is so lovely that really I can't look at it enough."

"Nonsense, Emma," responded her spouse, in an agony lest his amiable consort's remarks should be overheard. "Prince Friskovitch's hair is just like anybody else's."

"No, it isn't, John—that's exactly what it is not. Dear me! I'd give anything to know where he gets his pomade. I wonder whether he uses bear's grease or vaseline. There's such a beautiful gloss on His Highness' hair, and the parting—John, have you noticed how narrow and white it is. I'd willingly give a five-pound note to have a photograph of it."

"Then you'd spend your five-pound note in an uncommonly foolish way."

"You may think so, I don't. A photograph of Prince Friskovitch's back hair would serve to remind me all my life of a most charming and delightful afternoon. I only wish it could last for ever."

"The back hair or the afternoon?"

"How silly you are, John, and so slow at understanding things that it's useless my trying to explain. You haven't a particle of loyalty in your composition, not to be affected by such an elevating sight as we have seen to-day."

"I haven't seen anything particularly elevating," rejoined Mr. Davidson bluntly. "I have seen a foreign prince, who I grant you is good-looking enough in his way, amuse himself with one lady of somewhat questionable renown, and flirt with another who, if report says truly, is very little better than she ought to be."

"For shame, John, for shame! It's disgusting to hear you talk so rudely and coarsely. All I know is, you or I would feel very proud if we were sitting in those chairs by His Highness' side at this minute."

"As we are not likely to occupy so distinguished a position it is impossible to say *how* we should feel. For my own part, I don't believe it would do us much good, and in all probability you would be unfitted for the rest of your life for performing your proper duties."

"I shouldn't mind trying the experiment," sighed Mrs. Davidson. "They say all the ladies fall in love with the Prince, wherever he goes, and I'm sure, now that I have seen him with my own two eyes, I'm not a bit surprised. There's something tremendously fascinating about that back-parting of his. I can't tell you why, but it has produced quite an impression upon me."

And so saying, the worthy lady clasped her hands rapturously together and stared harder than ever at the object of her admiration.

The players on the far side still struggled bravely on. The brilliant rays of the sun pouring obliquely into their eyes, dazzled them disastrously. They missed ball after ball. Amelia's overhand service proved terribly effective. Despondency and fatigue completed the work of demoralization already begun by having lost their toss. The set was short, sharp and decisive. Amelia and Hetty won the first three games out of five, and were thus proclaimed victors of the ladies' tournament. The four girls clustered round the net, with bright eyes, flushed faces and heaving bosoms. They were all tired.

Suddenly, Prince Friskovitch was seen to leave his seat, and to walk across the lawn. The girls, hearing footsteps, turned round

and before they could recover from their confusion, found themselves being addressed by no less a person than His Serene Highness. Fortunately, Lady Elizabeth Mannering knew what was customary under such circumstances. She ducked down until she seemed to disappear among her petticoats, and the three other young ladies followed her example, with more or less awkwardness, for they were not in the habit of courtesying to princes.

"Allow me to offer my congratulations to the victors," said Prince Friskovitch, with that genial and fascinating smile, which had won him female hearts in every capital of Europe, and rendered the ladies his firm allies. "You played splendidly, and so," shaking hands with Lady Elizabeth, "did your opponents, who were at considerable disadvantage. But you must be very tired. Will you not," once more addressing himself to Hetty and Amelia, "come and rest in the shade?" So saying, he walked slowly back from whence he had come, with a shy, pleased girl on either side of him. As he approached his seat, Mrs. Patman and Mrs. Crown-Shuffer rose grudgingly enough. It was gall and wormwood to the elder beauties to see two young, fresh and quite unpainted ones appear on the scenes, but they had had their innings, as Prince Friskovitch seemed to think, for with a slight inclination of the head and a polite, "We meet again this evening," he dismissed them.

And lo! who should be installed in the thrones of the departed favourites but Hetty and Amelia. They could positively hear their hearts thumping against their sides. Their recent exertions at lawn-tennis had not produced half such an internal commotion, and all the time, silly little Hetty kept saying to herself: "Ah! I wish he could see me now. I wonder what he would say? I wonder if he would think more of me? Oh Karl! why don't you come? Everyone is here but you."

The girls were disposed to be unusually silent. Even Amelia's customary fluency deserted her just at first. But the Prince had such charming manners, he was so gay, so lively and unaffected, that he soon managed to set them quite at their ease, and they ended by feeling no more afraid of him than if he were any ordinary acquaintance. He skilfully led the conversation to their own topics, and, strange to say, appeared as much interested in them as if he had been a Commoner. He liked precisely the

same things as they did, from dancing to toffee, and both his listeners were so delighted at the discovery that they never actually realized how great was His Highness' power of being able to adapt himself to his company, or that it was this talent which rendered him equally popular with Princes of the Blood, as with mere school girls like themselves.

"I say, O'Banashee," said Prince Friskovitch after a time, turning round and addressing his faithful shadow, whose thoughtful devotion must occasionally have touched his Royal heart, "you must ask these charming young ladies to dinner one night soon, and invite me to meet them. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir. I shall be delighted," answered his Lordship, with a monkey-like smile illumining his sharp little face.

"Very well then," went on the jolly Prince. "That's settled. Fix your own night. I only make one stipulation. Let there be no chaperons. I object to them on principle." And he gave a hearty laugh, which seemed to say, "I leave it to you, O'Banashee. You know, without being told, the sort of party that I like. A friendly, informal party, with plenty of pretty women at it, and nobody very straitlaced."

Lord O'Banashee became convulsed with merriment, just as if his distinguished patron had said something particularly witty and amusing. The fact is, it is not difficult to pass for a wit when one is a Prince. The smallest remark that drops from Royal lips is apt to be rapturously received, quite independent of its actual worth. So much depends upon the mood of the listener. If he is disposed to see humour in the tritest observation the effect is the same as if the humour were really there.

Lord O'Banashee's sentiments with regard to our two young ladies, had undergone a very remarkable change in the last quarter of an hour. Hitherto he had treated them with a certain amount of condescension and lordly patronage befitting one of his high rank when dealing with people of theirs. But now, when he saw with what enthusiasm Prince Friskovitch had taken them up, how His Serene Highness laughed at Amelia's unconventional jokes and gazed at Hetty's lovely profile—in short, when he perceived that they threatened to supersede Mrs. Patman and Mrs. Crown-Shuffer altogether, he no longer entertained any doubts as to their being of the Right Sort. Henceforth they were branded "In Society," and had become proper and respect-

able persons to profit by his—Lord O'Banashee's—hospitality. He made a mental note, as long as they continued to attract the Prince, to ask them to all his parties. Truly his Lordship was a nice, generous and benevolent man, who well deserved being made up to by the ladies. The wise ones realized this and overwhelmed him with delicate attentions. If he were not the Prince, he was the next thing to the Prince. A stepping-stone who could help the dear darlings to rise; a rung on the social ladder to be carefully and earnestly approached. Such is success; at least success of the sort, where Titles and Royalties are the goal, round which swarm hosts of ugly, parasitic, male and female creatures. If it content them, such success is suited to their capacity.

Amelia and Hetty demurred when Lord O'Banashee invited them to dinner without any fitting chaperon. They were not quite sure whether they would be allowed to meet His Serene Highness, armed only with the precious safeguards of their youth and innocence. They temporized and said they must ask leave, acting with a prudence which reflected great credit upon them, especially as they were all the while dying to accept the invitation.

"Well!" exclaimed Prince Friskovitch, with light good humour. "We need not trouble over details. I never do. It's a mistake. O'Banashee, I count upon you to arrange matters, as you have done scores of times before. If the worst comes to the worst, and the parents of these young ladies are obdurate, we must have a garden-party or something of that sort instead. Eh! By Jove! what do you say? I think a garden-party would be rather a good idea this hot weather."

"An excellent idea," responded Lord O'Banashee. "I'll see about it at once, and make out a list when I get home, which I will submit to your Highness before sending out the invitations."

"That's right, Timothy. You're a capital chap. Never was a better. By-the-bye, don't leave out La Crown-Shuffer. We can't get along without her, to give piquancy and a touch of Bohemianism to the entertainment."

Lord O'Banashee hesitated. The lady was notorious.

"Isn't she—isn't she *rather* a strong order, sir?"

"Oh! dear no, she's amusing. And when a woman's amusing,

it covers a multitude of sins, and much may be forgiven her. Besides it's such fun seeing all the virtuous and irreproachable dames glower at her behind my back."

"As you will, sir, but I think we should do better to leave Mrs. Crown-Shuffer out on this occasion."

"What! O'Banashee. You turning proper! That is a joke," and the Prince laughed heartily.

"Propriety is catching. I learn it from you, sir," he rejoined, demurely. "Never did pupil have a chance of profiting by a more virtuous example."

"Better and better. And now I must go and take my afternoon glass of water. These young ladies have made themselves so fascinating that I forgot all about it. Good-bye, Miss Davidson; good-bye, Miss Dawkins, for the present. We'll make that fellow, O'Banashee, give us a garden-party yet, in spite of his excuses." So saying, the light-hearted Prince departed, accompanied by his satellite.

No sooner had he gone than the two girls found themselves surrounded by a small crowd of friends and relations, who simultaneously ejaculated:

"My dear—what did he say? What did he talk about? Weren't you awfully frightened? I should have been, in your place. I felt so sorry for you being stuck down there and being made so terribly conspicuous. Everybody will know you in future. It really must be very embarrassing to modest young women to be publicly noticed in that way. I can't tell you how thankful I am it wasn't me," etc., etc.

The older they were, the more fervently did they express their gratification. One fair virgin of about forty-five thanked God that *she* had not been exposed to such an ordeal. *She* never could have borne being rendered so remarkable.

Amelia and Hetty felt a little intoxicated by the double triumph of winning the tournament and of making Prince Friskovitch's acquaintance; but they were much too shrewd to display their elation to these well-meaning, kindly, but officious friends. They parried their questions cleverly enough, declaring in an off-hand manner that His Highness was very nice, but, for the matter of that, much like anybody else. Needless to say, in their own hearts they entertained a very different conviction. Those susceptible organs would have been hopelessly lost to the

charming Prince, had they not already been occupied by two young gentlemen of whom we wot.

For the remainder of that day Hetty was subjected to a severe cross-examination. Amelia escaped more easily, her aunt, Mrs. Northcote, not taking the same burning interest in Royalties as did the excellent Mrs. Davidson.

Mr. Davidson, too, was proud of his daughter's achievements, but no element of envy entered into his satisfaction.

It was different with his spouse. In that lady's cup of happiness was mingled a very considerable drop of bitterness. She felt that, as the author of Hetty's being, she, also, ought to have been introduced to Prince Friskovitch. His Highness should have had the opportunity afforded him of perceiving from whence the girl derived her good looks. It did not seem right for a child like Hetty to be the recipient of such honours, when she, with her best *moire antique* gown, at twelve and six the yard, her fashionable high bonnet, with the gold thistle on one side and the bird of paradise on the other, which she had insisted on introducing, was ignored. Yes; ignored—that was the word. Surely people had no eyes nowadays. This was the melancholy conclusion at which she reluctantly arrived. Good dress, good manners, good appearance—what could even a Prince want more?

Luckily for all parties Mrs. Davidson kept these sentiments to herself. Had she mentioned them to her lord and master, she had a pretty shrewd presentiment what the result would have been. He would have accused her of being jealous of her own daughter, as he had already done on one or two previous occasions. The idea! Could anything be more ridiculous? But husbands always had a way of saying silly or else spiteful things. They could not refrain from making themselves disagreeable.

(To be continued.)

Lessing.

By JOSEPH FORSTER.

GOTTHELD EPHRAIM LESSING was born at Kamenz, in Pom-
erania. His father was his first teacher ; afterwards John Godfrey,
the Protestant clergyman of the place, took him in hand. When
he was twelve he was sent to the free school of Meissen, and
remained there for five years, and acquired an intimate knowledge
of the Greek and Latin languages. From Meissen he went to
the Leipsic University. His father wished him to become a
clergyman ; this he declined to do, on the ground that he did not
possess the necessary qualifications. Lessing was true to the core
in all he did and all he said. That was his leading characteristic.

Up to this time Lessing had been a student of books only ;
he now began to study mankind. He went into society, and
was a diligent attendant at the theatre. Poetry and the drama
became for a time his favourite studies. He wrote his first
comedy, and it was performed with success by the Leipsic
company. He also published a volume of poems, entitled
"Trifles." Soon after this he went to Wittenberg, where he
took his M.A. degree. He left Wittenberg for Berlin, where he
published in 1753 and 1754 an edition of his miscellaneous
writings, in four volumes, 12mo. At Berlin he met Moses
Mendelssohn, the celebrated Jewish philosopher, and, in fact,
associated there with the most distinguished men of the time.

From the charms of this delightful society, Lessing retired to
Potsdam, in order to finish his tragedy entitled "Miss Sara
Sampson." This was the first tragedy of middle-class life pro-
duced in Germany. It was received with great applause, and
was translated into the Italian, French and Danish languages.

In 1760 he was elected an honorary member of the Berlin
Academy of Sciences. In 1765 he published the "Laocoon,"
one of the most profoundly philosophical and beautiful works on
poetry and art ever produced. In spite of these signal successes,
Lessing's circumstances were very embarrassed. So much so,

indeed, that he resolved to sell his effects and go to live in Italy. In 1772 his splendid tragedy, "*Emilia Galotti*," was performed for the first time at Brunswick, and soon after on every stage in Germany. His next great work was his supreme masterpiece, "*Nathan the Wise*." The last production of Lessing's genius was a treatise "*On the Education of the Human Race*." His health had been bad for a long time; in addition to this, he had been bowed down by cruel poverty. At last his constitution gave way, and he expired on the 15th of February, 1781, at the age of fifty-one.

The rest of my paper shall be devoted to an analysis of "*Nathan the Wise*" and of the treatise "*On the Education of the Human Race*," two of the sublimest works in any literature.

Among the papers left by the dead poet and philosopher were two containing suggestions with which he meant to preface his work, had he not been deterred from doing so by fear of increasing the cost of publication. In these notes Lessing informs us that he took the first idea of "*Nathan*" from Bocaccio's tale of "*Melchisedeck the Jew*" (*Giornata i., Novella iii.*), and had planned his drama some years before it took final shape and saw the light.

Writing to his gentle friend, Eliza Reimarus, he says, "The inclosed is a notification"—(of the approaching publication of "*Nathan*")—"that will surprise some of my friends, at least. But if you turn to Bocaccio's tale of '*Melchisedeck the Jew*,' which supplies me with the groundwork of my play, you will readily find a key to my purpose. I must try whether I shall be allowed to preach from my old pulpit, the stage, without molestation."

He informs his brother that "The folks here are on the lookout for '*Nathan*,' and imagine I know not what on the subject. But you, my dear brother, have formed an entirely mistaken idea of its character. It will be anything but a satirical piece. . . . I have, in fact, only returned to my play at this time because I saw that, with some slight alterations in the plan, I could counter-march and fall to great advantage on the enemy. These alterations I have made, and my piece is already in as great a state of forwardness as anything else I have ever written has been when I began to print. Nevertheless, I shall go on pruning and polishing till towards Christmas, then begin writing off fair for the press; proceed leisurely with the printing, and be ready to appear without

fail at Easter. Set Voss's"—(the publisher and bookseller at Berlin)—"mind at ease, therefore, on this score: my work will be ready by Easter next, though there should not be twenty subscribers and I have to print at my proper cost. You may also assure him that 'Nathan' does not meddle with the clergy, and that I will not myself bar the way to its finally reaching the stage, though this may not happen for a century to come."

There remained one formidable obstacle, however, to the completion of "Nathan"—money to keep the author alive while he wrote it. Lessing would have nothing to do with money paid before the work was completed. "Suppose," said he to his brother, "I were to die suddenly? I should then owe a thousand people, perhaps, a couple of shillings, every one of whom would feel himself entitled to abuse me to the extent of a couple of crowns at least. Yet what am I to do? Money I must have until Easter comes round, and to provide it I should have constantly to pause in a work which will not brook interruption. Could you find me a friend to advance the needful for a few months on the usual terms? I should greatly prefer it. I require at least three hundred dollars to enable me to stick closely to my work, in which the slightest distraction could not fail to make itself manifest. I should, of course, give my note of hand for the amount, and were I taken off suddenly before it came due, there would be enough left to redeem the bond."

Lessing's brother, Charles, must, we may presume, have been as poor as he, or he would have advanced the modest sum required, for the brothers were united by the tenderest affection and confidence. Charles, however, spoke to a kind-hearted Jew of Hamburg, Moses Wessely by name, to whom Lessing's works were well known and greatly admired. Wessely said he was willing to advance the amount required if Lessing himself would write to him and ask for the loan.

"Suppose," said Charles Lessing, "that he should not be disposed to write such a letter?"

"He should have the money, nevertheless," said the kind-hearted Jew, "for when he touches the amount he will surely write to acknowledge the receipt."

And to the generosity of a Hamburg Jew the world owes one of the purest and most exalted works in the world's literature.

We may also believe that the generosity of Wessely added

some of the many masterly strokes which make "Nathan" live as a grand and imperishable picture of wisdom and magnanimity. Lessing fully realized that this was his last great production. He felt the full power of thought active in his mighty brain; but the heart and the poorly-nourished body were rapidly giving way.

Lessing gave the world "Nathan the Wise" in return for a very limited supply of bread and water!

Lessing's preceding plays, "Minna von Barnheim" and "Emilia Galotti" were in prose; but he determined that "Nathan" should be in verse.

"If I had not told you that 'Nathan' is in verse," he writes to his brother, "you will probably be surprised to find it so. Do not fear, however, that this will cause any delay in my work. My prose has hitherto cost me more labour than my verse. True, you may say, than such verse! By your leave, I should think my verse much worse if it were much better."

Lessing selected verse because it is the most concentrated form of human speech; in fact it is, or should be, the quintessence of prose. What a good thing it would be if some producers of flabby, sprawling, rhymed twaddle would learn that. "I have not had recourse to verse," he writes to his friend Ramler the poet, "in consideration of its euphony. I have thought that the Oriental tone I must adopt here and there would better consort with verse than with prose."

Lessing, in writing to his constant friend, Eliza Reimarus, refers to the isolation in which he lived; hated by the wicked, misunderstood by the foolish, as all original, disinterested thinkers have been. "I am left here entirely alone; I have not a friend near me to whom I can unbosom myself, and I am daily assailed by a hundred anxieties. I must indeed pay dearly for the single year I lived with my beloved wife. How often do I lament the day that I aspired to be as blessed as other men. How often wish that I could return to my old solitary state—be nothing, and do nothing save that which the necessities of the passing moment required. But I am too proud to think myself unhappy; I set my teeth and let the boat drive as wind and tide determine—*enough that I do not myself upset it.*"

In addition to the cruel calumnies raised against him, Lessing's home and heart had been darkened also. He lost his

beloved wife, whose delightful companionship cheered him only for one short year. The circumstances of that loss added to its severity ; she died giving birth to a child. Both mother and child were interred together. Lessing evidently pours out the sorrow of his soul in the following scene between the Lay Brother and Nathan. The latter adopts and educates a Christian child, which is brought to him by the Lay Brother.

Lay Brother. Full oft

Have I myself with streaming eyes deplored
That men who call them Christians should forget
That our dear Lord Himself was born a Jew.

Nathan. You, my good brother, must defend my cause
Should bigotry and hate rise up against me,
By reason of my act towards this dear child. . . .
To you I feel me moved to impart a tale
Involving deeds of a far different dye—
But take the secret with you to the grave !
To tell a tale I have not till this hour
Once breathed into the ear of living man ;
To you alone I ope my mind ; to you,
The simply pious soul, I show my grief ;
For such as you alone can understand
What trust in God implies, how love of Him
Can reconcile us with the hardest fate !

Lay Brother. You are much moved—your eyes are full of tears.

Nathan. You with the infant found me at Darun ;
But you knew not that some few days before
A Christian rabble rose on the Jews at Gath,
And murdered all—women and children, old
And young ; you know not that with them my wife
And seven hopeful sons, whom I had lodged
For safety in my brother's house, were burned
To death !
When you arrived,
Already had I lain three days and nights
In dust and ashes, and in tears 'fore God—
In tears said I ? Almost at war with God,
Raving against myself and all the world,
And vowing deathless hatred to the Christian name.

Lay Brother. Ah ! I can well believe you, in your plight.

Nathan. But reason by degrees returned, and I,
In calmer mood, could say :
And yet God is !
This, too, God suffered !
So—His will be done !

Come, put in practice that thou apprehendest ;
 That which, if thou but wilt, is not more hard
 To practise than to apprehend—Arise !
 I rose, I stood erect, and called on God,
 And said : I will, if such be Thy behest !
 'Twas then that you dismounted at the door,
 And put into my hands the babe, wrapt close
 Within your cloak. What then you said to me,
 What I to you, is long ago forgotten ;
 But this I know : I took the helpless child,
 Laid it upon my bed, kissed it, sank down
 Upon my knees and sobbed aloud : O God,
 One of my seven restored to me—thanks, thanks !
Lay Brother. Nathan, you are a Christian ! 'Fore my God,
 No better Christian lives !

Nathan's life is in danger from having adopted a Christian child, for whom he engages a Christian nurse, and who taught it, by this noble Jew's orders, the Christian religion.

Lessing's "Nathan" appears to me to embody the divine lesson, "that humble, meek, merciful, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion, and, when death has taken off their masks, they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wore in life had made them strangers."

"Our little systems have their day ;
 They have their day, and cease to be :
 They are but broken lights of Thee,
 And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith, we cannot know ;
 For knowledge is of things we see ;
 And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
 A beam in darkness : let it grow.

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
 But more of reverence in us dwell ;
 That mind and soul, according well,
 May make one music as before.

But vaster. We are fools and slight ;
 We mock Thee when we do not fear ;
 But help Thy foolish ones to bear ;
 Help Thy vain worlds to bear Thy light."

One passage of Lessing bears witness to the lofty purity of his genius and the deep humanity of his nature : "By the pursuit, not by the mere possession of truth is man ennobled and his

powers enlarged. Were the Almighty Father to appear with all truth in His right hand, and in His left the power of attaining truth with the liability to err attached, and say, 'Son, take thy choice,' I should reply, 'Father, truth absolute is for Thee alone; the power to search and the gift to apprehend bestowed by Thee suffice for man. I choose the left.'"

That sublime passage reminds me of Browning's masterpiece, "Abt Vogler." I can only quote the concluding lines:

"Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable name?
 Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
 What, have fear of a change from Thee who art ever the same?
 Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?
 There shall never be one lost good! What was shall live as before;
 The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
 What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
 On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.
 All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good shall exist;
 Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good power
 Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,
 When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
 The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
 The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky
 Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
 Enough that He heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.
 And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
 For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
 Why else was the pause prolonged, but that harmony might be prized?
 Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
 Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
 But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
 The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know."

If the Almighty ever whispered in the ears of mortal men, He did into those of Lessing and Browning. How the noble poet of the past passes the burning torch of truth into the hands of the grand seer and poet of our own day! Yes, indeed, all wise and good men are of one religion!

The scene of "Nathan the Wise" is in Jerusalem. Saladin is on the throne. He is generous and even prodigal, and sends for Nathan, a rich Jew, to borrow money of him. Nathan, in the course of their conversation, tells Saladin the following story:

Nathan.

In the olden, olden time
 There lived an Eastern chief, who owned a ring

Of priceless worth, had from the hands of one
 He dearly loved. The stone, an opal, flashed
 The broken lights in hundred lovely hues
 Upon the eye, and had the marvellous power
 To make him loved alike of God and man,
 Who, strong in his assurance, wore the ring.
 What wonder therefore if the Eastern lord
 Ne'er left the treasure from his hand, and made
 Such disposition as secured its passing
 As heirloom in the house for ever. He,
 Leaving the ring to him among his sons
 Whom he loved best, commanded that his heir
 Should in his turn bequeath it to the one
 Among his sons whom he most dearly loved ;
 And more : that the possessor of the ring,
 Without regard to claims of prior birth,
 In right of the ownership alone, should rule
 As lord of all. You understand me, Sultan ?
 Proceed. I understand.

Saladin.

Nathan.

So came the ring
 From sire to son, until at length it fell
 To one, the father of three loving sons,
 All dutiful alike, and all by him
 Cherished with like regard ; now this, now that ;
 And then the third appearing in his eyes
 The dearest and the best, as each in turn
 Was left with him alone, the other two
 Not sharing then in the love that filled his heart—
 Each, in a word, seemed worthiest of the ring ;
 And he, with pious weakness, promised each
 That he should have it. Time ran on, and on,
 Till the old man, knowing his end drew nigh,
 Began to feel the pain of his position :
 It grieved him sorely now that he must needs
 Defeat the hopes of two among his sons,
 Each one of whom he knew relied on him.
 What could be done—how 'scape from the dilemma ?
 He summoned privily a jeweller,
 Of whom he ordered two more opal rings,
 After the pattern of the one he wore,
 Nor cost nor pains being spared in making them
 Exactly like his own. The artist triumphs :
 The rings produced, the father cannot tell
 Which of the three is his. Content, resigned,
 He calls his sons in turn to his bedside,
 And gives to each his blessing and a ring,
 And then soon after dies. You mark me, Sultan ?

Saladin. I mark you well ; but end your tale, I pray.

Nathan. It is already at an end ; for all
That follows may be readily divined.
The father dead, each son displays his ring,
And would assert his place as lord of all ;
Discussion follows, difference, dispute—
In vain ! The true ring cannot now be known.

(Pause.)

As little known as 'mong ourselves this day
The true religion.

Saladin. What, is't thus you answer me ?

Nathan. Sire, I but seek excuse from hazarding
Distinction 'twixt three rings expressly made
So much alike, that one to outward view
Should not be known from another.

Saladin. But the rings ! And see you palter not with me in this
Methought the three great Dispensations named
Were verily distinct from one another—
Distinct, even to the meat and drink and garb
Of those professing them.

Nathan. But not distinct

As to the grounds on which they rest in common—
The grounds whereon we all receive our faith.
For rest not all alike on history,
Traditional or written ? And history
Must still be taken upon trust.
Now whose the faith and truth we question least ?
Whose but our own ; or those from whom we sprang ;
Whose blood is in our veins ; who from our birth
Have given us proofs of their enduring love ;
Who never even for our weal deceived us ?
How, then, should I believe my fathers less
Than you do yours, or how require of you
To give to your progenitors the lie
That you may credit mine ?

I speak as Jew to Mussulman ; to Christian 'twere the same.

Saladin. (Aside.) By Heaven, the man says well, and I am answered.

Nathan. Return we to the story of our rings :
As said, the sons could come to no agreement ;
Each swore in turn before the judge that he
Had had his ring immediate from the hand
Of his dear father—and how true was this !
That he besides had had his father's promise
Of all the privileges of the ring—
How, no less true ! his father loved him dearly ;
Could not have played him false : sooner than think
Of harbouring doubts of one so dear to him,

Though still disposed to think the best of them,
 He'd rather charge his brothers with foul play ;
 But he'd find means to unwork the traitors ; yes,
 He'd be revenged.

Saladin. Well done, what said the judge ?
 I long to hear what you will make him say.

Nathan. Thus spoke the judge :
 'As you do not—cannot—
 Produce the father, I dismiss the suit.
 What, think ye I am here to unravel riddles ?
 Or shall we stay until the true ring speaks ?
 But hold ! The true ring has the power, 'tis said,
 To make its owner loved of God and man :
 This must decide. The counterfeits, you'll own,
 Have no such virtue. Say then, as ye stand,
Which of the three love two the most ?
What—silent all ! Each loves himself alone,
And ye are doubtless all alike deceived :
 The rings ye wear must needs be counterfeits ;
 The magic ring was lost, as it would seem,
 And to conceal the loss, your loving father
 Had those you wear made like it.'

Saladin. Excellent !

Proceed, I pray !

Nathan. The judge went on and said :
 'If ye seek judgment, and not counsel, go
 But would ye rather be advised, I'd say :
 Content ye with the matter as it stands.
 If from his father each have had a ring,
 Let each believe his own to be the true one.
 'Tis possible your father willed to end
 This sovereignty of one among his sons.
 To me indeed, 'twould plainly seem, that he
 Had loved you all alike, when he took steps
 To aggrieve no two by favouring one. Well then
 Let each of you comport him in such wise
 As love unbribed commands ; let each resolve
 To show the world that in the ring he wears
 He holds the prize, its virtues being shown
 To man in acts of Justice, Meekness, Mercy,
 To God in thoughts of Love and heartfelt trust.
 And when a thousand thousand years have pass'd,
 When children's children's children wear the rings
 Came they anew before this judgment seat,
 One wiser than myself might then sit here,
 And make the award.'
 Thus spoke the righteous judge.

- Saladin.* My God! my God!
Nathan. Now, Sultan, if you feel
 That *you* are *he*—the promised wiser judge——
Saladin. Who—I? I, dust!
 I, less than nothing! No——
Nathan. My sovereign, what is this?
Saladin. Dear Nathan, no!
 The thousand thousand years of your wise judge
 Have not yet passed; his seat is not the one
 I fill! So leave me now; but be my friend.

I have nearly confined myself to the grand and sublime scene between Nathan and Saladin, because it contains the soul and spirit of real religion.

Before concluding, I will refer shortly to the treatise "On the Education of the Human Race." Lessing clearly states his belief that the human race, in its development, passes from law and obedience to a dogmatic creed to faith and love. He says, "In our 'Schemes of Redemption,' and 'Plans of Salvation,' we have not yet reached the full meaning of that name under which God has revealed himself in the latter days—Our Father.

"In our eagerness to prove the damnation of every soul who does not believe this or that dogma, we are in danger of forgetting that Christianity is either a Gospel of Salvation, or it is valueless; and we overlook the inevitable necessity that the human mind must pass through ignorance, doubt, and error, before it can be capable of receiving pure truth. . . . Each little sect or religion has, doubtless, had some germ of the truth within it, which has rendered it subservient to the great purpose of fertilizing the world—but so long as the professors of either of them think that they are the favoured children of the Divine Father, whom He regards with a complacency with which He does not view the rest of humanity, so long is the fulness of God's idea not attained by them."

This sublime work was translated very admirably by the late Rev. Frederick N. Robertson, of Brighton, who had evidently deeply studied Lessing's works, and assimilated their best teachings. Theodore Parker, too, had been a profound student of the same great teacher, as is proved clearly by his beautiful prayer:

"Father, I would not ask for wealth or fame,
 Though once they would have joyed my carnal sense.

I shudder not to bear a hated name,
Wanting all wealth, myself my sole defence.
But give me, Lord, eyes to behold the truth—
A seeing sense, that knows the eternal right :
A heart with pity filled and gentlest ruth ;
A manly faith that makes all darkness light.
Give me the power to labour for mankind,
Make me the mouth of such as cannot speak ;
Eyes let me be to groping men and blind ;
A conscience to the base : and to the weak
Let me be hands and feet ; and to the foolish mind :
And lead still further on such as Thy kingdom seek."

Those exquisite lines seem to lead up to that glorious burst of inspired song in which Coleridge pours out the soul of his soul. He, too, I think, was inspired by the sublime spirit of Lessing.

"Believe thou, O my soul,
Life is a vision shadowy of truth ;
And vice, and anguish, and the wormy grave,
Shapes of a dream !
The veiling clouds retire,
And lo ! the throne of the Redeeming God
Forth flashing unimaginable day,
Wraps in one blaze earth, heaven, and deep hell."

The Mystery of M. Felix.

By B. L. FARJEON,

Author of "GREAT PORTER SQUARE," "DEVLIN THE BARBER," "A YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE," "THE DUCHESS OF ROSEMARY LANE,"
"TOILERS OF BABYLON," etc.

Book the Third.

WHAT BECAME OF M. FELIX.

CHAPTER LV.

TREACHERY.

"NEWS, Agnold!" cried Bob, when I joined him in the country.

"Bravo!" I said, "out with it."

"Three men answering to the description of those we are seeking were seen yesterday on the road to Monkshead."

"Where is that?"

"Thirty-two miles from here as the crow flies."

"Who gave you the information?"

"Crawley. The fellow is of some use, after all."

I was not so sure, but when I questioned Crawley he was so precise and circumstantial in his account that I saw no valid reason to discredit him. He had received the news from a teamster, he said, who had passed the men on the road. Were they walking? Yes. How did the teamster know they were going to Monkshead? They were on the high road. How far from Monkshead? About ten miles.

"I have asked questions," said Crawley, "of every stranger who has passed through the village, and this was the only one who could tell me anything at all."

"Did you describe Dr. Peterssen's appearance to him?" I asked.

"Yes, and he said it was something like another of the men."

"Did you describe the third?"

"How could I, when I never saw him?"

I had put the last question as a test of Crawley's truthfulness; if he had answered otherwise the doubts I had of his veracity would have been strengthened.

"You believe he is speaking the truth, Bob?" I asked of my friend, Crawley being out of hearing.

"What reason has he to tell lies?" asked Bob in return.

"To show that he is doing something towards earning his wages."

"That's cutting it rather fine," said Bob. "You are giving Crawley credit for intellect; I think he is not overstocked in that respect. Can't afford to throw away a chance, Agnold."

"Certainly not, and this chance shall not be slighted. But we will not risk anything upon the hazard. My plan is this. Crawley, Sophy, and I will go to Monkshead on a voyage of discovery. You shall remain here to take advantage of anything that may turn up. I will keep you posted as to our movements; you will keep me posted as to yours. Blessings on the electric telegraph! You will repeat all telegrams that arrive for me to such places as I shall direct, retaining the originals in case of miscarriage. Do you agree to all this?"

"I must," said Bob, "though I would rather go with you."

"There would then be no one left in command here, and we should be burning our ships."

"All right. You are welcome to Crawley. Must you take Sophy?"

"I must. She is the only one of our party who is familiar with M. Felix. If we hunt Peterssen down M. Felix will most likely be with him, and Sophy is at hand for the purpose of identification. Should I have reason to believe we have struck the right trail I will wire to you, and you can come on to us. Say agreed, old fellow."

"Agreed, old fellow."

After that Bob and I were closeted together for an hour setting down all our arrangements in black and white; then I prepared to depart.

"Good luck, Agnold," said the faithful Bob. "Send for me soon."

"As soon as I can. I want you to be in at the death."

I spoke these words lightly, with no notion of their ominous significance, and a carriage and pair having been got ready for us, Crawley, Sophy, and I took our seats in it, and bowled along to Monkshead. We arrived there at noon on the following day, and at the post-office I found two telegrams sent by Bob, one

from himself saying that stagnation was the order of things, the other a copy of one forwarded from Emilia in London, in which she said that she had not heard from M. Bordier, and expected that he was on his way to her. The whole of the afternoon I was engaged in the attempt to discover whether any persons answering to the description of Dr. Peterssen and his companions had made any stay in Monkshead. I learnt nothing of a satisfactory nature, and thoroughly exhausted, I was discontentedly refreshing the inner man, Sophy sitting at the same table with me, when Crawley, who had been making inquiries, came in with a man who looked like what he was—a tramp.

"Here's a fellow," said Crawley, "who can tell us something."

"If I'm paid for it," said the tramp.

"You shall be paid for your trouble," I said, giving him a shilling. "This is on account. You shall have another if your information is satisfactory."

"He has tramped from Deering," said Crawley, "and passed the parties we are looking for."

"How far off?" I asked.

"A matter of forty miles," replied the tramp.

"Were they riding or walking?"

"Two was riding, one was walking."

"What was the conveyance?"

"What do you mean?"

"Were they riding in a carriage?"

"No, in a cart; top of sack of hay."

"What is the man who was walking like?"

His description enabled me to recognize Dr. Peterssen; it tallied with that given to me by Emilia, Bob and Sophy.

"And the two men riding on the hay?" I asked.

"Can't be so sure of them," said the tramp; but his description warranted the belief that they were Dr. Peterssen's patient and M. Felix. As to the latter I consulted Sophy, and she said it was something like M. Felix.

"How do you know," I inquired, "that these men were travelling in company?"

"'Cause two of 'em—one as was walking and the other as was riding—was talking to one another."

"Did you hear what they said?"

"No, I didn't."

He had nothing more to tell me, and he took his departure after receiving his second shilling.

I turned to Crawley and asked him how he had picked up the tramp.

"I was having half a pint at the Stag's Head," replied Crawley, "when he came in. Seeing he was a tramp I stood him a pint, and asked him where he'd come from. From Deering, he said. Then I asked him if he'd met anybody in particular on the road, and he said nobody; but when I spoke of three men in company, and gave him an idea of what Dr. Peterssen was like, he brightened up and told me what he told you. I thought you had better see him, so I brought him along."

I nodded and said we would start for Deering in the morning, and Crawley went to the bar to refresh himself. Now, whether I was influenced by my original latent suspicions of Crawley, or by the non-success I was meeting with, I was not entirely satisfied with Crawley, and my dissatisfaction was not lessened by the fact that I could find no valid reasons for mistrusting him. Later on it will be seen whether I was right or wrong in my impressions, but, as will also presently be seen, the trail I was following up, whether it were true or false, led to important results, the mere remembrance of which will abide with me as long as I live.

We did not reach Deering till late the next night. The post-office was closed, and I could not obtain the telegrams which I had directed Bob to forward, till the morrow. As on the previous day, there were two—one from Bob with no news, the other from Emilia expressing anxiety regarding the continued silence and absence of M. Bordier. I myself considered it strange, and I sympathized with Emilia's unexpressed fears that she had been buoyed up by false hopes. Things altogether were looking gloomy; we were drifting without a rudder, and my experiences in Deering tended still further to discourage me. There were no traces of the men I was seeking, and after dispatching letters and telegrams to Bob and Emilia, I seriously discussed with myself the advisability of returning to London and awaiting news of M. Bordier. Sophy broke in upon my cogitations.

"I've found 'im out," she said with a flushed face. "That there Crawley is taking of us in, you see if he ain't. He's been telling a pack of lies with 'is 'ay cart and 'is tramp. He's got 'old

of another cove, and is bringing of 'im 'ere. I 'eerd 'im telling the chap what to say to yer. I'm mum. 'Ere he is."

Sure enough there entered Crawley with another tramp, who told me a plausible story of having met Dr. Peterssen and his companions some thirty miles off. The fellow played his part fairly well, and when I refused to give him money began to bully. I soon silenced him, however, by threatening to give him into custody on a charge of conspiracy, and he slunk away without another word, but with a secret sign to Crawley, which I detected. Crawley would have followed him, but I had got between him and the door.

"You miserable sneak," I said, "your game's at an end. So, you've been coached by your scoundrelly employer, Peterssen, to deceive us, and I was fool enough to be taken in by you. What have you to say about it?"

He looked at me slyly, but did not speak.

"You are frightened that you may criminate yourself, but you have done that already. I can prove that you have robbed us of money, under false pretences; I can prove that you have entered into a conspiracy against us. Do you know the punishment for conspiracy? It is penal servitude, my friend. You wince at that. Honesty would have served your interests better, my fine fellow. Had you not behaved treacherously you would have been made for life. And now you will find that you have fallen between two stools. You think that Dr. Peterssen will reward you. You are mistaken. He has promised you a sum of money for misleading us. You will not get a penny of it. You fool! Better for you to have trusted straightforward gentlemen who had the means and the will to richly reward you, than a scoundrel like your master, who has used you as a tool. You are to report the success of your treachery to him personally. Where? In London? Go to him there, go to the address he gave you, and try and find him. As he has rogued others he has rogued you. Before you are many hours older you will learn that honesty would have been your best policy."

The play of his features proved to me that all my shots were faithful and had struck home. I gave him a parting one.

"I will put the police on your track. You are a marked man from this day, and you and your master will have to answer in the criminal dock for the crimes of which you are guilty."

I had moved from the door, and he, seizing the opportunity, darted through it and was gone.

"Fine words!" I exclaimed. "Much good they will do!"

"Never mind," said faithful Sophy. "You give it 'im 'ot, and no mistake. You frightened 'im out of 'is life; he'll shy at every peeler he meets."

"It will not help us," I said, in a rueful tone. "We are at a dead-lock."

"Never say die," said Sophy, cheerfully. "That ain't a bit like yer."

Upon my word her encouragement put fresh life into me, and I grew less despondent. Determined to leave Deering as quickly as possible I went to see about a trap, and here I met with another disappointment. I could not get a trap till the following day.

"We shall have to wait until to-morrow, Sophy," I said. "So let us make ourselves comfortable. I wonder if there's a local newspaper about. I will read you the news if there is; it will help to pass the time."

Upon what slender foundations do momentous issues hang! A pregnant proof of this truism was at hand. There was no newspaper printed in Deering, but at Fleetdyke, the nearest place of importance, was published a small daily sheet called the *Fleetdyke Herald*. The landlord at the inn at which we put up did not take in the paper, but it happened that a traveller, making pause there, had left behind him two copies of as recent date as yesterday and the day before. These the landlord brought in to me, and I sat down to entertain Sophy, who prepared herself for an hour of great enjoyment.

"What things in a newspaper do you like best, Sophy?" I asked.

"Perlice Courts," she replied, "when I gets the chance of anybody reading 'em out—about once in a bloo moon, yer know."

"Police Courts it shall be," I said. "I have a fancy for them myself."

So evidently had the Editor of the *Fleetdyke Herald*, who seemed to make it a special feature of his paper to gather the police-court news of a rather wide district around his locality as an attraction to his subscribers. I had read aloud to Sophy four or five of the most entertaining cases when I was startled by the

heading, "Tampering with a Register Book. Strange Case." I read the report under this heading rapidly to myself, and Sophy, observing that something had startled me, sat in silence and did not speak a word. The case was not concluded in the paper I was reading from. The last line ran: "Adjourned till to-morrow for the production of an important witness from London." I looked at the date of the newspaper—it was the day before yesterday. The other paper, which I had not yet taken up, was of yesterday's date, and I found in it the conclusion of the case. The first day's report, with its pregnant heading, startled me, as I have said. The second day's report startled me still more. By the merest accident my fingers were on the pulse of the torture of Emilia's life. I ran down to the bar; the landlord stood behind it, wiping some glasses.

"Is the village of Glasserton at a great distance from here?" I asked.

"O, no," replied the landlord, "about eleven miles. You can shorten it by two miles if you cut through Deering Woods."

I glanced at the clock—half-past four. "It's a melancholy walk through the woods," remarked the landlord, "but to be sure the moon will rise at ten."

"Can any one show me the short cut?" I asked. "I wish particularly to go to Glasserton to-night."

"My daughter will put you in the way of it."

"Thank you. Ask her to get ready. I will give her half-a-crown for her trouble."

I called to Sophy, and asked her if she was ready for a long walk.

"I'm ready for anythink," she said, "along o' you."

"Ten miles there, and ten miles back, Sophy," I said, for it was my intention to return to the inn that night.

"I'll walk all night if yer want me to."

"Come along, then, my girl."

I settled my account with the landlord before I left, and then, accompanied by his daughter, a girl of fourteen, we walked to Deering Woods.

"There," said she, "keep on this track and it will take you right through the woods till you reach the road for Glasserton. When you come to two tracks keep to the left."

The directions she gave were clear, and I made her happy with the promised half-a-crown.

"How far do the woods extend?" I asked.

"You'll have to walk six or seven miles," she replied, "before you get out of 'em—and mind you take care of the cliffs. They're dangerous."

"We shall see them, I suppose, before we come on them?"

"O, you'll see 'em right enough, but nobody goes nearer to 'em than they can help."

She stood looking after us till thick clusters of trees hid us from her sight.

"Step out, Sophy," I said, "we've got a long walk before us."

An explanation of the motive for my sudden visit to Glasserton will be found in the following extracts from the *Fleetdyke Herald*:

THE FIRST EXTRACT.

"Tampering with a Register Book. Strange Case.—M. Bordier and his son, Julian Bordier, of Swiss extraction, were charged with erasing a name, and writing another over it, from a marriage entry in the register book of marriages in the parish of Glasserton. Mr. Hare, the registrar, stated that the accused visited him yesterday afternoon, for the purpose, as they said, of verifying a copy of a marriage certificate which they brought with them. The marriage in question was solemnized over nineteen years ago, and, according to the entry as it now stands, was between Gerald Paget and Emilia Braham. The elder of the accused made the examination, and professed himself satisfied. He then requested the registrar to step out of the office with him, saying that he wished to make some private inquiries of him. The registrar consented, and the two went outside for a few minutes, the questions which M. Bordier asked relating to the witnesses to the marriage, Julian Bordier meanwhile remaining alone in the office with the register book. Mr. Hare, who has been registrar for about three years, answered the questions to the best of his ability, and then M. Bordier summoned his son from the office and the accused departed. In the evening Mr. Hare had occasion to consult the register book, and as a matter of curiosity he referred to the entry which his visitors in the afternoon had called to verify. To his astonishment he discovered that the name of the bridegroom had been erased, and the name of Gerald Paget written over the erasure. His suspicions fell immediately upon M. Bordier and Julian Bordier,

and learning that they had left the village, he obtained a warrant for their arrest, and, with a policeman, started in pursuit. The accused were greatly agitated when they were told to consider themselves under arrest, and the elder of the two commenced an explanation, to which, however, Mr. Hare and the constable refused to listen. He then begged to be permitted to write and telegraph to London for legal and professional assistance, which, he said, would establish their innocence, and his request being granted, he wrote and despatched both letters and telegrams. The registrar having finished his evidence, the magistrate said the case was quite clear, and asked the accused what they had to say in their defence. M. Bordier, who assumed the office of spokesman, his son preserving a somewhat scornful silence, handed the magistrate two telegrams he had received from London in reply to those he had despatched. M. Bordier said that he refrained from putting any questions to the registrar, giving as a reason that he was ignorant of the procedure in English Courts of Justice. The magistrate, having read the telegrams, remarked that the names attached to them were those of eminent and renowned gentlemen whose time must be very valuable. As they promised to attend the court on the following morning and were anxious to return the same day, the accused were remanded till to-morrow for the production of these important witnesses from London."

THE SECOND EXTRACT.

"Tampering with a Register Book. Strange and Important Evidence.—Result.—M. Bordier and his son, Julian Bordier, were brought up on remand on the charge of altering a signature in a marriage entry in the register book of the parish of Glasserton. Upon the case being called, Mr. Lawson, of the well-known firm of Lawson and Lawson, of St. Helen's, London, who said he appeared for the defence, asked that Mr. Shepherd, the eminent expert in caligraphy, should be allowed to examine the register book, and the application was granted. The clerk read the evidence given yesterday by Mr. Hare, the registrar, who stated, in reply to a question from the magistrate, that he had nothing to add to it. Mr. Lawson then proceeded to cross-examine the witness:

"'You state that the register-book was examined in your presence?'—'Yes.'"

"Was there any possibility of the signature being tampered with while you were by?"—"It could not possibly have been done in my presence."

"Was M. Bordier left alone in the office with the book?"—"No."

"In point of fact you did not lose sight of him during the whole of the visit?"—"I did not."

"Not even for a moment?"—"Not for one moment."

"Then he could not have made the erasure or have written the name over it?"—"He could not."

"You do not accuse him?"—"Of actually committing the offence, no. Of being an accessory, yes. He called me out of the office to give his accomplice time to do what he wished."

"We shall see. Only M. Julian Bordier could possibly have altered the entry?"—"Only he."

"Mr. Lawson (to the Magistrate): 'This proves that M. Bordier could not have made the erasure.'—The Magistrate: 'Exactly.'"

"Cross-examination continued: 'It is not important to the case, but are you familiar with the record of the marriage of Emilia Braham and Gerald Paget, or between her and any other person?'—"No, I never had occasion to refer to this particular entry."

"Were M. Bordier and his son the only visitors you received on that day who wished to verify an entry in the register book?"—"The only visitors."

"After they left you did you leave your office?"—"For an hour in the evening."

"Before you discovered that the entry had been tampered with?"—"Yes, before that."

"Who was in charge of the premises while you were away?"—"The servant, Jane Seebold."

"When you made the discovery of the erasure did you ask Jane Seebold if any one had called in your absence?"—"I did not."

"Did you at any time inform her that the book had been tampered with?"—"I did not."

"You jumped at the conclusion that the gentlemen you accuse must be guilty?"—"There is no other conclusion."

"That will do. Call Mr. Shepherd."

"Mr. Shepherd stepped into the witness-box."

"Mr. Lawson: 'You are an expert in handwriting?'—Witness: 'I am; it is my profession.'

"'You have given evidence in many celebrated cases?'—'I have.'

"The Magistrate: 'Mr. Shepherd's name and reputation are well known.'

"'Have you examined the entry of the marriage between Emilia Braham and Gerald Paget?'—'I have.'

"'There is an undoubted erasure of the signature of the bridegroom?'—'There is.'

"'The name, Gerald Paget, as it now appears, has been recently written?'—'Quite recently, within the past week. The state of the ink in which the name is freshly written proves it.'

"'You put a marked emphasis upon the words "freshly written." Have you a reason for doing so?'—'I have. Upon a careful examination of the entry I am of the firm opinion that the name erased is the same as the name written above the erasure. The letters have been very cleverly traced.'

"The Magistrate: 'That sounds very strange.'

"Mr. Lawson: 'It does; but it is a puzzle that may be solved. Say that there is here a question of property which would fall to the Emilia Braham who is married according to this entry. To become possessed of this property she must prove her marriage with Gerald Paget. Some one interested on the other side gets hold of the register book, and erases the name of Gerald Paget. What name shall be substituted in its place? What but that of Gerald Paget? This opens up the suggestion that a friend of Emilia Braham (speaking of her in her maiden name) has also paid a visit to the register book, has erased the bridegroom's name, and written in its place that of Paget, to prove the said Emilia's marriage with him. A formidable suspicion is thrown upon her, and the very entry upon which she relies is weighty evidence against her.'

"The Magistrate: 'It is an ingenious theory, but I cannot see that it has any bearing upon the present case.'

"Mr. Lawson: 'It has an indirect bearing. I have here a copy of the marriage certificate, which I must ask you to compare with the entry in the register book. You will see in the copy that the name is Gerald Paget, and you cannot doubt that the copy is genuine.'

"The Magistrate: 'There can be little doubt of that. The state of the paper is a proof.'

"Mr. Lawson: 'If the copy had been lost, it would have greatly strengthened those whose interests are opposed to Mrs. Paget's. I have nothing further to ask you, Mr. Shepherd. Call Jane Seebold.'

"Jane Seebold was shown in the witness-box.

"Your name is Jane Seebold?'—'Yes.'

"You are in the service of Mr. Hare?'—'Yes.'

"Do you remember the day before yesterday?'—'Yes.'

"In the evening Mr. Hare went out for an hour?'—'Yes.'

"Was the office in which the official books are kept open?'—'Yes, it was, and I was sweeping it out.'

"Did anybody call while you were so employed?'—'Yes, a gentleman.'

"Did he inquire for any one?'—'Yes, my master.'

"Well?'—'I told him he was out.'

"What did he say to that?'—'He said he would wait for him.'

"You allowed him to wait?'—'Yes.'

"In the office?'—'Yes.'

"What did you do while he waited?'—'I had work in other parts of the house, and I went and did it.'

"For how long was the gentleman left alone in the office?'—'Half an hour perhaps.'

"Then you went in to him?'—'Yes, and he said he was going, and he went.'

"Did you tell your master of the gentleman's visit when he returned?'—'No, I didn't.'

"Why didn't you?' The witness hesitated. 'Why didn't you? Remember that you are on your oath, and that if you prevaricate or speak falsely you may get yourself into serious trouble. Why did you not tell your master of the gentleman's visit?'—'Well, he gave me five shillings, and told me to say nothing about it. I don't see that I've done any harm.'

"You can step down.'

"The Magistrate: 'Stop a moment. Where were the official books while the gentleman was in the office?'—'In their proper place—the desk.'

"Mr. Lawson: 'Was the desk locked?'—'The lock's been broke all the time I've been in the place.'

" 'So that all a person had to do to get hold of the books was to lift the lid?'—'Yes.'

"The Magistrate: 'Your conduct was very reprehensible.'

"The witness then left the box.

"Mr. Lawson: 'We have brought the inquiry now to this point. Supposing the erasure to have been made on the day in question, the commission of the offence lies between M. Julian Bordier and the person who visited the registrar's office in his absence.'

"The Magistrate: 'Quite so. I think the registrar should keep these important public books in a more secure place—in an iron safe.'

"The Registrar: 'I am not supplied with one, your Worship, and I cannot afford to buy one. My servant's evidence comes upon me as a surprise.'

"The Magistrate: 'I repeat what I said. These official records should be kept in safer custody. The authorities should provide proper receptacles for them.'

"Mr. Lawson: 'I shall proceed now to prove that it is an utter impossibility that M. Julian Bordier can be guilty of the offence with which he and his father are charged. Call Mr. Wordsworth.'

"This gentleman, whose name and fame are world-renowned, then gave his evidence, which was short, conclusive, and surprising.

" 'You are an oculist?'—'I am.'

" 'You are attending M. Julian Bordier?'—'Yes.'

" 'Is that the gentleman?'—'That is the gentleman.'

" 'What are you attending him for?'—'For his sight.'

" 'Could he the day before yesterday have erased a name from the register book and written another name above it?'—'It is utterly impossible.'

" 'Why?'—'Because he was blind. He is blind now. His eyes are open but he cannot see. It is against my express wish that he left London. If he does not return immediately and abide by my instructions, I shall despair of restoring his sight.'

"M. Bordier: 'May I say a word?'

"The Magistrate: 'Certainly.'

"M. Bordier: 'I came to Glasserton to compare the copy of a marriage certificate with the original entry. My son's happiness depended upon this proof, and he insisted upon accompanying

me. He would not be dissuaded, and although I feared there was a risk, I yielded to his wish. When we were arrested I endeavoured to explain matters to the registrar and the officer, but they would not listen to me. Ignorant of the methods of English Courts of Justice, I thought it wisest to obtain counsel and assistance from London. That is all I have to say.'

"Mr. Lawson: 'Is it necessary, your Worship, for me to address you?'

"The Magistrate: 'No. The gentlemen are discharged, and I regret that they have had to submit to this trial. I trust, Mr. Wordsworth, that you will be able to cure M. Julian Bordier.'

"Mr. Wordsworth: 'If he will be guided by me, I hope to restore his sight.'

"The parties then left the court."

CHAPTER LVI.

NIGHT IN DEERING WOODS.

I HAD a twofold object in going to Glasserton. In the first place I wished to see for myself the original record of the marriage in the register book; in the second place I wished to obtain from the registrar's servant, Jane Seebold, a description of the visitor she allowed to remain in the office while her master was absent from the house. It was evident that she had no knowledge of the purpose of the visit which M. Bordier and his son Julian paid to the registrar in the morning; and it was equally evident that the man who bribed her to silence was the man who erased the signature. I had no doubt that it was either M. Felix or Dr. Peterssen, who by this artful trick hoped to pave the way to a doubt of the genuineness of Emilia's marriage with Gerald Paget. The scoundrels had no idea that the copy of the marriage certificate had been found, or that M. Bordier and his son were in the village on the same day as they. All that they wished to do was to make some provision for a possible contingency in the future. If, as was very likely, they read the case in the newspaper, they must have been confounded by the conviction that they were hoist with their own petard. I was now satisfied that when I left Bob I had started on a true trail, despite the knavish devices of Dr. Peterssen's tool, Crawley.

The walk through Deering Woods was a dreary one, but it

would have been much more dreary had it not been for Sophy, who was always entertaining and original, and never more so than on the present occasion. I let her partially into my confidence, and she was delighted to know that she had been the direct means of throwing light on a cruel injustice. We trudged along side by side, the most amicable and agreeable of companions.

"It'll wake aunty up when she 'ears everythink," said Sophy. "She'll think me good for somethink then."

"You are the best and brightest little girl in my acquaintance, Sophy," I said.

"I didn't take *you* in, did I?" she asked.

"No, indeed," I replied. "It was a lucky day for me when I first met you."

"Not so lucky for you as for me," she said. "I've got a silver watch."

"It will turn into a gold one by the time you're a woman."

"Will it?" she exclaimed. "Shan't I be proud!"

About half way through the woods I saw the cliffs of which the landlord's daughter had warned me. In the dark they would have been dangerous indeed to one unfamiliar with them. At some time or other there had been a great landslip, which had opened up a chasm of great depth; in parts slight fences had been put up, but there were spaces entirely unprotected, and I was thankful we had been warned of the danger. It was half-past seven by my watch when we reached Glasserton, and I had no difficulty in finding the registrar's house. He was at home when I called, and did not receive me too cordially. He had been upset by the trial, and it was with the greatest difficulty I succeeded in obtaining a glance of the original entry of the marriage. It was only by bribery and threats that I effected my purpose, and I had to use extreme persuasion to induce him to grant me an interview with Jane Seebold. I elicited very little from her in consequence of the state of confusion she was in, but I was satisfied in my own mind that it was M. Felix who had tampered with the book. From her imperfect description of the man I judged that he must in some way have disguised himself for the purpose of the visit, and I was assisted to this conclusion partly by the height of her visitor, who she said was not a tall man. Dr. Peterssen was not less than six feet, and having to decide between him and M. Felix I

decided unhesitatingly in favour of the latter. The registrar had been in Glasserton but three or four years, whereas Jane Seebold had been in it all her life, and I learned from her that two of the three witnesses to the marriage, the doctor and the old waggoner, had long been dead. At nine o'clock my inquiries were ended, and Sophy and I started back for the inn.

"Tired, Sophy?" I asked.

"Not a bit," she answered cheerfully, "I could walk all night."

Still we did not get along so fast as in the early part of the evening; it would have been cruel to take unfair advantage of Sophy's indomitable spirit; the girl would have walked till she dropped, and I had some consideration for her. Therefore it was that we did not reach the middle of Deering Woods till past ten, by which time the moon had risen. When I was not talking to Sophy my mind was occupied by the task upon which I had been engaged. Since my first introduction to the Mystery of M. Felix a great deal had been accomplished. The mystery had been practically solved, although the public were not yet in possession of the facts. Emilia's sufferings were at an end; she had been fortunate in gaining a champion so noble and generous as M. Bordier, and her daughter's happiness was assured. I could understand now her anxiety as to M. Bordier's silence since his discovery of the copy of the marriage certificate, and I divined his reason for it. With a horror of publicity, and out of regard for her, he did not wish her to become acquainted with his and his son's arrest until he himself informed her of it, and he entertained a hope that the report of the case would not get into the London papers. I also now understood her anxious references to M. Julian's state of health; they bore upon his failing sight, to restore which he and his father had come to London. The young man had been imprudent, but I trusted to Mr. Wordsworth's assurances that he could make a cure of him if Julian would abide by his instructions. I had no doubt, now that Emilia's good name was established, that Julian would submit to the guidance of this eminent oculist, whose heart was as kind as his skill was great.

So far, all was well; but I was not satisfied; I could not consider my task accomplished till I had brought Dr. Peterssen and M. Felix to the bar of justice and restored to Emilia's arms the husband she believed she had lost in Switzerland.

Sophy broke in upon my musings.

"Is there a man in the moon?" she asked.

"They say so," I answered lightly.

"I see 'is face," said Sophy, "as plain as plain can be."

We were near the fallen cliffs as these words passed between us, and before I had time to utter another my attention was arrested by the sound of a shot.

"What's that?" cried Sophy.

"A gun or pistol fired," I replied, "and not far off."

"I don't mean the firing," said Sophy, "I mean the scream. Didn't yer 'ear it?"

"No, Sophy, no scream reached my ears."

"It reached mine. I can 'ear anythink, if it's in the next street."

"Was it after or before the shot?" I asked.

"About the same time, I think. They come both together."

"Let us go and see what it is, if you're not afraid."

"Me afraid!" she said contemptuously, and she ran before me in the direction from which the sounds had proceeded. We had not proceeded fifty yards before we both stopped simultaneously, with an exclamation of horror on our lips. On the ground before us lay the body of a man, pressing his hand to his heart, from which the blood was flowing. He struggled into a sitting posture, and was endeavouring to rise to his feet, when he fell back with a groan, and moved no more.

I rushed to his side and bent over him.

"There has been murder done," I said. "He is dead."

"Yes," said Sophy, in a low tone, as she stooped over the body. "He's dead this time, and no mistake."

"Dead this time!" I repeated in wonder.

"Don't yer see who it is?" she asked. "It's Mr. Felix!"

M. Felix! This, then, was the end of the ill-spent life. The evil record was thus suddenly snapped, and the man who was supposed to have died in Gerrard Street, Soho, on the night of the 16th of January, lay dead before me in the lonely Deering Woods. his last breath but just drawn.

"Are you sure, Sophy?"

"Ain't *you* sure?"

"I cannot be. I never saw him in life."

"I can't be mistook. It's Mr. Felix—but O, ain't it orfle! who could 'ave done it?"

"Who, Sophy? Who but his companion in crime, Dr. Peterssen."

At this moment, from an unseen hand behind, Sophy was struck to the ground. Her scream of pain was frozen on her lips, and she lay prone before me.

"You infernal villain!" I cried, and turned.

The moon was shining brightly, and by its light I saw the form of Dr. Peterssen. In his upraised hands he held a heavy stake. I strove to avoid the blow, and received it on my arm. Before I could recover myself the stake was raised again, and again it descended upon me, this time upon my head. The earth swam round. Again I was struck with savage violence, and as I fell the last thing I saw was the moon with a face in it which smiled upon me in the likeness of Dr. Peterssen.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CAVERN IN THE CLIFF.

I OPENED my eyes in darkness. How long I had remained insensible I did not know, nor did I know where I was. All that I was conscious of at first was a dull pain in my head, but presently I was sensible of other facts. My hands were tied behind me, and my mouth was gagged, so that I could only utter unintelligible moans. To my astonishment my moans were answered by similar sounds at a short distance from me. Pain and suffering are selfish and dominant qualities, and some few moments passed before I thought of my brave Sophy. Then it occurred to me that the moans I heard proceeded from her, and that she was in the same condition as myself. My immediate feeling was one of thankfulness that she was alive. In vain did I strive to free my hands; in vain did I strive to speak intelligible words; in vain did I strive to pierce the black darkness in which we were enveloped. I did not know whether it was day or night, and I shuddered to think of the fate in store for us. Soon I found myself forgetting my own peril entirely, and dwelling only upon poor Sophy's. Bitterly did I reproach myself for bringing her to this pass, for it was I, and I alone, who was responsible for the doom which would surely overtake her. I had no doubt that we were imprisoned here to die, and it was I who had sealed her fate.

My thoughts did not flow steadily and uninterruptedly. Every now and then I relapsed into unconsciousness, and when I revived it seemed to me as if I took up quite naturally the thread of my reflections at the point at which they were broken off. These intervals of insensibility may have been long or short for all I knew. I was starving ; I was parched ; I would have given the world for a drink of water ; but I can say truthfully that if water had been available for only one of us, I would have set my lips hard and given the relief to my companion in misery. I have read of exquisite tortures inflicted upon unfortunate people by barbarous nations—aye, and by some civilised nations as well—but no tortures could have been keener than those I endured. Minutes were like hours, hours like days. It was impossible under such conditions to keep count of time.

There were sounds of movement outside our prison house—if house it was—sounds of scraping feet and falling stones. I strained my ears. Nearer and nearer came these sounds, until they were within a few feet of me in my rear, but I was so securely bound that I could not turn my head. One word was spoken in the form of a question.

“Alive?”

The voice was that of Dr. Peterssen. I had never heard it, but I would have staked my hopes of release upon the issue. Not by the faintest moan did Sophy or I answer this ruthless question. A match was struck, a candle was lighted, and Dr. Peterssen stood between us, holding the candle above his head. With malicious significance he put the candle close to poor Sophy's face, then close to mine, and waved his left hand as though he were introducing us to each other. I gazed at Sophy, who was as little able to move as I was myself, and the tears came into my eyes as I noted the absence of reproach in her observance of me. Indeed her expression was one of pity, and not for herself.

“Touching, isn't it?” asked Dr. Peterssen, and then cried savagely, “You pair of beauties! You reap what you have sown!”

By the dim light I perceived that we were in a kind of cave, the entrance to which was at the back of us, and I judged that the cavity was low down one of the dangerous cliffs of which we had been warned. After his attack upon us Dr. Peterssen must have carried us here and buried us alive, as it were. I subsequently

learned that my surmise was correct, and that I had hit upon the exact method of our imprisonment.

Dr. Peterssen stuck the candle in a niche, and approached me.

"Would you like to be free to speak?" he inquired. "If so, move your head."

I moved my head.

"You will not shout?" he continued. "You will not cry for help? Move your head again, and I accept it as your word of honour. You are a gentleman, and would not forfeit it." There was a frightful scorn in his voice when he referred to me as a gentleman.

I moved my head again, and he took the gag from my mouth.

"Raise your voice above its natural tone, and I'll cut this beauty's fingers off."

He took a clasp knife from his pocket and opened the blade. It was sharp, it was bright, and I knew he would keep his word.

"A drink of water," I murmured.

"I have it here." He held an uncorked bottle to my lips.

"Not for me," I said. "For her."

"You will drink first," he said; "then she shall have her turn. If you refuse neither of you shall touch it."

I drank, and I saw that Sophy closed her eyes while I did so. Nectar was never so sweet as that long draught, for he did not stint me. Then he replaced the gag in my mouth, and removing Sophy's, went through the same process with her.

"That's jolly," said Sophy faintly.

"Yes," said the scoundrel, "you will be very jolly by the time I have done with you. Listen to me. You clever couple are as completely in my power as if we were on a desert island. Not a human being is within miles of us. To show you how little I care for your cries, I free both your tongues." Once more he took the gag from my mouth. "Only if you speak too loudly, each shall suffer for the other. I will cut you to pieces before each other's eyes if you disobey me. So, my clever little beauty, you came into my house as a dumb girl. *Are* you dumb? Answer—quick!"

"No, I ain't," said Sophy; "you know that as well as I do."

"But you played your part well—I will say that of you—and went about like a sly mute, eyes and ears open, ready for treachery. If I had suspected, you would never have got out

alive. Answer my questions, and answer them truthfully, if you do not wish to be tortured to death. Did you steal the desk?" Sophy was silent; he laid the keen blade of the knife he held on her face. "Answer!"

"Answer him, Sophy," I said, fearing for the child.

"Yes," she said, "I did steal the desk."

"Who set you on?"

"I did," I replied quickly. "She is not to blame. Upon me should fall the punishment, not upon her."

"It shall fall upon both of you, and upon your comrade who brought her to me, if only I can lay hands on him. There was a secret in that desk, was there not? Don't keep me waiting too long."

"There was," I said.

"Did you find it?"

"Not I, but another found it."

"Your friend, and that sharp-witted gentleman from Switzerland. A copy of a marriage certificate, was it not?"

"Yes."

"To think," he said bitterly, "that that fool should have had the desk in his possession all these years, and never discovered it! He is rightly served. He can play no fool's tricks where he is now."

"He is dead?" I said.

"He is dead. I killed him, as I intend to kill you, only yours will be a longer and more lingering death. Do you think my confession injudicious? You are mistaken. You will nevermore see the light of day; you will nevermore set eyes upon a human being but myself. You are here, in a tomb. This is your grave. I can afford to be candid with you. Open speaking is a luxury in which I can freely indulge. Here, eat." He fed us with hard dry bread, and we both ate ravenously, he watching us the while with malignant eyes. "Am I not a merciful gaoler? But I don't want you to die just yet. You shall suffer still more. Tell me why you have been hunting me down?"

"I was engaged in befriending a much-injured lady."

"You had better have looked after your own business, and left me to manage my own unmolested. A much-injured lady! Christian name, Emilia?"

"Yes. I cannot injure her by answering you truthfully. She

has powerful friends near her who are capable of protecting her."

"Doubtless. Something more was discovered through this little witch here, was there not? Remember what I have threatened you with. The truth I will have, if I have to cut it out of your heart. What more have you discovered?"

"To what do you refer?"

"I had a patient—I speak in the past tense, because I have given up business—concerning whom you entertained some curiosity. You know who that patient is. His name? Quick!" He touched Sophy's hand with the point of his knife, and drew blood. She never winced.

To save the poor girl, I answered, "Gerald Paget."

"Good. These compelling measures are admirable. But do not think you are telling me news. I can find my way through a maze as well as most people. It is in my power to give *you* some interesting information. For instance as to where this Gerald Paget is at the present moment."

"You have not disposed of him then?" I ventured to say.

"O, no. Another kind of death is in store for him. He is in prison for the murder of a gentleman unknown to the law, but known to us as Leonard Paget, to many other persons as M. Felix."

I repressed the indignant words that rose to my lips. Dr. Peterssen smiled and continued: "It is a remarkable complication. A man is found dead in Deering Woods, shot through the heart. This man is Leonard Paget, alias M. Felix. There is found upon his person nothing that can lead to his identity. The murder is perpetrated at a distance from London, and no one suspects there can be any connection between the murdered man and the M. Felix who so mysteriously disappeared from the purlieu of Soho. The last whose suspicions are likely to be roused are Emilia Paget—I am courteous enough, you see, to call her by her right name—and her friends. Wrapt up in their own concerns, a murder so remote has no interest for them. And murders are common. They occur all over the country. The housekeeper who attended upon M. Felix would be able to identify him, but what should bring her into this part of the world? So far, you must acknowledge, I have managed fairly well, and if it had not been for your meddling I should be safe. Curse you! But I am even with you now."

"I do not expect you to answer me," I said, "but how is it that the unfortunate gentleman whom you and your confederate have so sorely oppressed has to answer for a crime which you perpetrated?"

"Why should I not answer you? What passes in this grave will never be known, and I can afford to be magnanimous. The fool you pity was found near the body, in possession of the pistol with which the deed was done. Give me credit for that little manoeuvre."

"Does he not declare his innocence?"

"He declares nothing. The small spark of reason which was left to him is extinguished, and he utters no word. His silence, his vacant looks, are proofs of guilt. They will make short work with him. He will be committed for trial; the Assizes are near, and he will be tried and condemned. No living persons but ourselves can establish his innocence. If you were free you could accomplish it, but you never will be free. Fret your heart out. It will be a pleasure to me to witness your sufferings."

"Retribution will fall upon you," I said. "Your presence here convinces me that you are yourself in danger."

"I should be if I walked abroad, but I have disappeared. In this charming retreat I propose to hide till Gerald Paget is done for. Then, the interest of the affair at an end, I can provide for my own safety. Meanwhile, I can manage, at odd times, to purchase food enough to keep things going. Already I have in stock a few tins of preserved provisions, a supply of biscuits, some bread, spirits to warm me, tobacco to cheer me—to be smoked only at nights. Trust me for neglecting no precautions. It is not a life a gentleman would choose, but I am driven to it—by you." He filled his pipe and lit it.

"Is it night now?" I said.

"It is night now. I am fond of society; that is the reason I spare you for the present. When you have served my turn I will rid myself of you."

"Have you no pity?"

"None."

"If we refuse the food you offer us, if we prefer to die at once, we can deprive you of the pleasure of torturing us."

"You can suit yourself. My experience is that life is sweet; hope lives eternal, you know. You can amuse yourself with the

hope that you have still a chance. Do so ; it is immaterial to me. I know what the end will be. Be silent now ; you have talked enough."

He examined our fastenings to see that they were secure, and then he gagged us. Before he did so, however, I said to Sophy :

"Can you forgive me, my dear, for bringing this upon you ?"

"There ain't nothink to forgive," she replied. "If I've got to die I'll die game."

Dr. Peterssen laughed sardonically, and did not give me time to say another word. The spirit of the child amazed me ; she was of the stuff of which heroes are made. "If by a fortunate chance," I thought, "we escape the deadly danger which holds us fast she shall be richly rewarded." I saw no hope of escape, but I would cling to life to the last. Dr. Peterssen was right in his conjecture ; I would not hasten the doom with which we were threatened, and which seemed inevitable. I slept fitfully, and in my intervals of wakefulness I judged from Sophy's regular breathing that she slept more peacefully than I. I was thankful for that. Where our gaoler took his rest I do not know. He did not disturb us for many hours. My eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and when I fully awoke I could dimly see Sophy's face. She could see me too, for when I smiled at her she smiled at me in return. Clearly it was Dr. Peterssen's intention to keep us alive for some time at least. He gave us bread and biscuits to eat and water to drink. Days passed in this miserable way, and if I do not dwell upon them it is because I have little that is new to relate. Occasionally Dr. Peterssen allowed us to talk, and bandied words with us for his own malicious gratification. I asked him once whether we could purchase our release.

"You would give a large sum for it," he said.

"All that I possess in the world ?" I answered.

"If it could be done with safety to myself," he said, "I would entertain the offer ; but you know as well as I do that it could not be so done."

"Why not ?" I asked.

"You would betray me."

"I will swear a solemn oath that your name shall never pass my lips."

"An oath that you would break at the first convenient opportunity. You are a man with a conscience, and you would hasten

to prove the innocence of Gerald Paget. How would you accomplish that without mention of my name? Come, now—air your sophistry, and see if you can persuade me to act like an idiot. As for money, I am well supplied. When I am rid of you and this stubborn little witch I mean to enjoy myself in another country.”

He pulled out a bundle of bank notes, and flourished them before my eyes. I thought of Bob's words that M. Felix kept always a large sum of money on his person, and I knew that the notes had once been his. Our gaoler took pride in such like acts of ostentatious candour, to show how completely he had us in his power and how little he had to fear from us. I cannot say at what period of our imprisonment I fell into a stupor which would have lasted till the hour of my death had Dr. Peterssen's fell intentions succeeded. It seemed to last for an eternity of days and nights, and in the few intervals of consciousness which came to me I prayed that I might not grow mad. Sometimes I heard Dr. Peterssen's voice as he forced water and sopped biscuit down my throat. I had no desire to refuse the food, but my strength was gone, and it was with difficulty that I could swallow. I could have borne my fate better had it not been that Sophy was never absent from my mind. Sleeping or waking I thought of her, and my misery was increased tenfold. I remember an occasion when I whispered to Dr. Peterssen :

“Is she still alive?”

“She is still alive,” he said with a brutal laugh. “She has the pluck and strength of a dozen men.”

Those were the last words he addressed to me, in my remembrance, nor do I remember speaking to him again. Delirious fancies held possession of me, and although I must have had periods of insensibility, I do not recall them. I could not now distinguish the real from the unreal. I heard voices that did not speak ; I saw pictures that had no existence ; I passed through experiences as intangible as the gloom which encompassed us. All the people I knew, but chiefly those with whom I had been lately associated, played their parts in my wild fancies. The scene on the Thames Embankment with Emilia, my midnight visit to her daughter Constance, my adventures with Sophy, the episodes in the police court and M. Felix's chambers, my journeys to and fro in search of clues to the mystery, the introduction of Bob Tucker

into the affair, all these and every other incident associated with my championship of a wronged and injured lady, took new and monstrous forms in my disordered imagination. I grew weaker and weaker. Surely the end must soon come.

It came. There were loud shouts and cries, and voices raised in menace, terror, and defiance. These sounds conjured up a host of confused forms struggling around me. A hand touched my face, an arm was passed round my neck; my head lay upon a man's shoulder.

"Agnold!"

My mouth, my limbs, were free, but I could not speak, I could not move.

"Agnold! Don't you hear me? It's Bob—Bob Tucker! I've found you at last—you're saved! Speak one word to me; move your head, to show you understand me!"

I smiled feebly; I had had so many of these dreams; I did not open my eyes.

"Great God! Have I come too late? O, you black-hearted villain, your life shall pay for it!"

Gentle hands raised my head. My eyes, my face, were bathed with cold water; a few drops of weak spirits were poured into my mouth, which I swallowed with difficulty. Surely there was here no delusion!

"That's right, Agnold; that's right, old friend. We'll soon pull you round. You are too weak to speak—I see that. But don't you want to hear about Sophy?"

Sophy? I strove to struggle to my feet, and fell back into the friendly arms ready to receive me. I opened my eyes; they fell upon Bob, who smiled and nodded at me. If this was delusion then, indeed, I was mad.

"For God's sake don't deceive me, Bob!" He must have followed my words in the movement of my lips, for sound scarcely issued from them. "This is real. You are my friend, Bob Tucker?"

"I am your friend, Bob Tucker, who ought to be whipped at the cart's tail for not having found you before. But I am in time, and I thank God for it!"

"You spoke of Sophy?" I did not dare to ask the question which was in my mind.

"I did. Your voice is getting stronger already. She's all right. Don't you fret about her."

"I want the solemn truth, Bob. She lives?"

"She lives. It is the solemn and happy truth, dear friend. She is near you at the present moment."

"Bring her close to me. Let me touch her hand."

It was placed in mine and guided to my lips. I kissed it, and a weak voice stole upon my ears :

"I'm as well as well can be, Mr. Agnold ! I'll dance yer a 'ornpipe if yer like !"

"My brave girl—my dear, brave Sophy ! O God, I thank Thee !"

Then everything faded from my sight and I heard nothing more.

CHAPTER LVIII.

FRIENDS TO THE RESCUE.

SOPHY and I were lying on two couches placed so that my eyes could rest upon her face. A day and a night had elapsed since our rescue, and I had gained strength surprisingly. With the help of Bob I had dressed myself in the afternoon, and seeing that the exertion had nearly exhausted me he insisted upon my lying down on a couch. I, on my part, upon learning that Sophy had also with assistance dressed herself, in "spick and span new clothes," as she afterwards informed me, insisted feebly but firmly that she should be brought into my room ; so there we were, gazing at each other, and rapidly recovering from the terrible ordeal through which we had passed. Warm baths, an entire change of clothing, rest in a soft bed—surely the clean sheets were the most delicious that mortal ever lay between—nourishing food, and the blessed sense of safety, had done wonders for us. Bob had refused with stern kindness to give me any account of his movements until I was in a fit condition to listen to him, and it was not until this day that he consented to place me in possession of the facts. His statement, up to a certain point, will be best explained in his own words.

"Two days having passed," he said, "without hearing from you, I became anxious. The last letter I received from you was written in Monkshead, and in it you informed me that you were going farther on, but you did not mention the name of the place for which you were bound. As you had left Monkshead, it was

useless my wiring or writing to you there, so I was compelled to wait your pleasure. Of course, in these circumstances, one always thinks that a letter has gone wrong, and as no other arrived I inferred that you had given me some information of your movements in the supposed missing letter, without which I had no idea what to do. At length I came to the conclusion that you had returned to London, and I determined to follow you. Even if I did not see you there, I might learn from your family or friends something which would enlighten me as to where you were, and what you were doing. Your family had not heard from you, and as they did not appear in any anxiety concerning you, I said nothing, you may be sure, that would cause them alarm. Then I sought an interview with the lady whose cause you espoused, and whom should I meet with her but M. Bordier. He was the soul of politeness, and I could not fail to be impressed by the radiant happiness, which shone in the lady's face. I ascribed this joyful expression to the document which M. Bordier had found in the secret drawer of the desk, the particulars of which he had jealously concealed from me. Neither he nor the lady had heard from you. 'We hope to see him soon,' the lady said, 'to thank him for his wonderful kindness to us.' Before I left them M. Bordier drew me aside, and expressed a hope that I would do nothing to make public what had transpired with respect to the purloining of the desk, and the discovery of an important document in it. 'I assure you,' he said, 'that it is entirely a private matter, and that publicity would cause the deepest pain to unoffending persons.' I replied that I should do nothing of my own accord, and that the matter rested with you, and you alone. He thanked me and we parted."

I interrupted Bob here. "Did M. Bordier make no reference to a trial in which he had been involved?"

"Nothing."

"Have you read of no trial in which his name appears?"

"No. Let me finish first; you will have plenty to tell me when I have done. From M. Bordier I went to the office of the *Evening Moon*, and was equally unsuccessful in obtaining news of you. Somewhat puzzled I made my way back to the neighbourhood of Tylney House, and thence went on to Monkshead. I had no particular fears for your safety, but I resolved, if possible, to track you. It was only on the second day of my arrival at

Monkshead that I obtained news which led me to believe you had gone to Deering. Away I posted to Deering, and there I learnt that you had gone to Glasserton, on what errand was not known. The landlord's daughter had shown you a short cut through the woods. I took the high road, as less likely to mislead me; but I may mention that before I started from Deering the girl who directed you informed me that only you and a young girl had gone to Glasserton. What, then, had become of Crawley? At Glasserton I heard that two persons answering to the description of you and Sophy had been in the village, that you had remained but a few hours, and had then started back towards Deering. I immediately returned to Deering, but you had not reappeared there. It was then that a fear of foul play flashed upon me; it was then and then only that I began to fear for your safety. There had been a mysterious murder committed in Deering Woods, and the murderer was committed for trial——"

"My God!" I cried.

Strange as it may appear, I had not until this moment thought of the murder which had been perpetrated in the woods. Heaven knows it was not from indifference that this lapse of memory had occurred to me, and I can only ascribe my forgetfulness to the intensity of my misery for several days past, during which I had been completely and entirely engrossed in the frightful sufferings I had endured. But now Bob's reference to the foul deed brought Gerald Paget's peril to my mind. I was so terribly excited that Bob caught hold of me in alarm, for I had started from my couch and was swaying to and fro on my feet.

"In Heaven's name," exclaimed Bob, "what is the matter with you?"

"Do not ask questions," I said, speaking with feverish haste, "but answer mine, and follow any instructions I may give you. The murderer is committed for trial, you say. Has the trial taken place?"

"It is taking place now," replied Bob, speaking as rapidly as I did; the contagion of my excitement had seized him. "The Assizes are on."

"What is the time?"

"Five minutes past four."

"When did the trial commence?"

"This morning, I heard."

"Is it over?"

"I do not know."

"Will it take you long to ascertain how it is proceeding?"

"I might do it in half an hour."

"Do it in less time if you can. I am not mad, Bob; I am as sane as you are. This is a matter of life and death, and, God forgive me, I have allowed it to escape me. One more question. You have not spoken of Dr. Peterssen. Where is he?"

"In prison under arrest."

"That is good news. Go now, quickly—and send the landlord up to me immediately, with some telegraph forms."

He hastened from the room, and in a very short time the landlord made his appearance. The vital necessity of immediate action had inspired me with strength of mind if not with strength of body, and my mental powers were quickened and sharpened by the crisis. I had settled upon my plan of action, and when the landlord handed me the telegraph forms I wrote the messages I wished to send with celerity and clearness. The most urgent and lengthy of these telegrams was addressed to M. Bordier, and in it I implored him to come to me without a moment's delay, and to bring Emilia with him. I told him that the husband whose death Emilia had so long mourned was now on trial for a murder of which he was innocent, that I had been mercifully rescued myself from a cruel death and held in my hands proofs of Gerald Paget's innocence, and that my case would be strengthened by the presence of Emilia and himself. I requested him to acknowledge my telegram the instant he received it, and to say when I might expect him to join me; it was imperative that there should not be the least delay, and he was to spare no expense in attending to my instructions. In addition to this telegram I despatched messages to my mother, to the editor of the *Evening Moon*, and to Mrs. Middlemore. Without further detail, I may say that I did everything in my power to bring the persons to my side whose presence I considered necessary for the work before me, and my despatches were winging to London before Bob returned.

He reported that the case for the prosecution was not yet concluded, that it was expected that the defence would be brief, and that the summing up of the judge would occupy some time. It was almost certain that the verdict would not be delivered until to-morrow. Counsel had been deputed by the judge to defend

the prisoner, who throughout the trial had maintained a strange silence, which some ascribed to obstinacy, and others to aberration of intellect. Having heard what Bob had to say, I addressed a letter to the counsel for the defence, urging him at the adjournment of the case to call upon me immediately, as I had news to communicate to him of the highest importance to the prisoner. My letter despatched, there was nothing more to do for at least a couple of hours, and I consented to listen to the completion of Bob's narrative. When he heard that a murder had been committed in Deering Woods fears for my safety flashed upon him, and he went to see the body of the murdered man. He was greatly relieved to find that the body was that of a stranger—it must be borne in mind here that he had never set eyes on M. Felix during that man's lifetime—but it did not dispel his fears. I had started back to Deering through the woods, and from that moment neither I nor Sophy had been heard of. He determined to remain on the spot and keep watch about the woods, in the hope of discovering what had happened to me. The idea of foul play between Deering and Glasserton had taken morbid possession of him, and he did not attempt to banish it. Day after day he searched and watched without result, until one night he saw a man walking stealthily through the woods with provisions he must have purchased somewhere in the neighbourhood. The stealthy movements of this man aroused Bob's suspicions, but although he followed him warily the man suddenly disappeared. This circumstance strengthened Bob's suspicions, and, with or without reason, he now came to the conclusion that the man, whose movements proclaimed that he was engaged in an unlawful proceeding, had something to do with my disappearance. He hired two men to watch with him, and at length his efforts were rewarded. The man was seen again at night creeping stealthily through the woods; again he disappeared at the same spot as on the previous occasion. It was at the edge of the fallen cliffs that this took place, and the men Bob had hired, who were more intimate with the locality than their employer, pointed out a downward track which bore marks of having been recently used. This track was noiselessly followed, with the result already recorded. Sophy and I were saved.

"I did not come an hour too soon," said Bob, when he had concluded his story.

"Not an hour, Bob. I believe I could not have lived another day."

A telegram was brought in to me. It was from M. Bordier: "We shall be with you to-night. Have not informed Mrs. Paget of the particulars. Not advisable to agitate her unnecessarily. Decide when we meet." Other telegrams were also brought to me, and I learned from them that my sister, a friend on the staff of the *Evening Moon*, and Mrs. Middlemore would also soon be with me. Bob had been thoughtful enough to arrange for the despatch of news from the court in which the trial was taking place. Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, nine o'clock, and the court was still sitting. The judge was summing up, and had expressed a desire that the trial should be finished that night.

"He is of the opinion," I said to Bob, "that the jury will not be long in giving their verdict."

"It looks like it," said Bob.

"Does this strike you as guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," replied Bob.

A note was here delivered to me from the counsel for the defence: "I cannot leave the court. The Judge will soon finish his summing up, which is unfavourable to the prisoner. He anticipates a rapid decision on the part of the jury, and a verdict of guilty. If your news is really of importance, and advantageous to the prisoner, come to the court immediately."

I gave the note to Bob to read, and rose.

"Sophy," I said, "are you strong enough to come with me? I am going to the court."

"I'm ready," said Sophy.

"Yes, Agnold," said Bob, "you must go."

He ran down, and by the time we reached it a trap was waiting for us.

"Have a couple of traps in waiting," I said to him, "and the moment the persons I expect arrive, bring them to the court. Especially Mrs. Paget, M. Bordier, and Mrs. Middlemore; and send also any telegrams that may come."

"Depend upon me, Agnold," said the good fellow. "Not a point shall be missed." He waved his hand as we drove away, and called out, "Good luck!"

And now I must encroach upon the columns of the *Evening Moon* for a description of the events of this agitating night. A

cooler head and a steadier hand than mine have made the record, and all that I have to do is to vouch for its accuracy.

CHAPTER LIX.

FROM THE COLUMNS OF "THE EVENING MOON," UNDER THE
HEADING, "THE MYSTERY OF M. FELIX SOLVED."

"THE stirring incidents of a great city are so numerous, and so pressing in their demands upon the space of the local papers, that it occasionally happens that incidents as stirring and exciting which occur at a distance from the Metropolis are either overlooked or dismissed in a short paragraph at the bottom of a column. This happened in a trial for murder which took place in the Midland Circuit, which, strangely enough, bears directly upon the mystery known as the Mystery of M. Felix. The circumstances of the case, so far as they were known to the public on the day on which the trial took place, are as simple as they are singular. A man was found murdered in Deering Woods. He was a stranger in the neighbourhood, and nothing was found on him which could establish his identity. His pockets were empty, and his underclothing was unmarked. He met his death by a shot fired from a revolver, and the bullet was extracted from his body. In the same woods on the same night a man suspected of the murder was taken into custody. He had in his possession a six-barrelled revolver, and one of the barrels had been discharged. Upon being questioned he refused to answer, but looked vacantly about him. The bullet which was extracted from the body of the murdered man fitted the discharged barrel, and was similar to the bullets with which the remaining five barrels were loaded. The accused, who was properly committed for trial, was, like the victim, a stranger in the neighbourhood, and bore about him nothing that could lead to his identification. His silence was a suspicious element in the charge against him, and the revolver with which the deed was done being found upon him, there was little room for doubt that he was the murderer. What the motive for the crime could have been it is impossible to say; if it were robbery the stolen property was carefully hidden away, for no traces of it were discovered. The evidence was simple, but appeared to be complete, and the

accused lay in prison until the Assizes, which were held soon after he was committed. At the trial he preserved the same stubborn silence as he had maintained before the magistrate. Asked to plead, he made no answer, and a plea of not guilty was recorded. He had no counsel, and one was assigned to him. The young barrister to whom the defence was intrusted had a difficult task before him. He could obtain not the least assistance from the prisoner, who stood in the dock apparently unconcerned regarding his fate. But it is said that there could occasionally have been observed on his features a pitiful expression, which aroused the sympathy of the spectators. This expression has been described by an onlooker as that of a man who had borne the cruellest and bitterest of buffets in his course through life, and who had been brought to a pass in which he looked upon death as the kindest mercy which could be meted out to him. There were women in court who sobbed as they gazed upon his sad and hopeless face, and yet could not have accounted for their tears on any other grounds than those of unreasoning sentiment. That this mute and unconscious appeal had a powerful effect upon the jury will be seen a little further on; it certainly led them to act in a manner which is perhaps unprecedented in a trial for murder in an English court of justice. There were very few witnesses. The surgeon who extracted the bullet, a gunmaker who testified that the barrel had been recently discharged and that the bullet was one of six with which the weapon had been loaded, the constables who arrested the prisoner—these were all that were called for the prosecution. The Crown counsel elicited all the facts in a fair and impartial manner, and it was evident that he considered the case conclusive. The cross-examination was skilfully conducted, severe tests being applied to the evidence respecting the bullet; but the witnesses remained unshaken. The cross-examination of the constables was directed principally to the demeanour and conduct of the prisoner. Did he make any resistance?—No. When he was arrested, was he endeavouring to make his escape?—It did not appear so; he was wandering through the woods. Was it, to all appearance, an aimless wandering?—Yes. Did he make any excuses for, or give any explanation of, his presence in the woods?—He did not utter a single word. Did he endeavour to hide or get rid of the revolver?—No. For the

defence a physician who had examined the prisoner was called. His testimony was to the effect that the prisoner was afflicted with melancholia, and that his mind was in such a condition as to render him irresponsible for his actions. It was clear that the line set up for the defence was that the prisoner was insane. The cross-examination of the physician somewhat damaged the weight of his evidence. Did he base his belief that the prisoner was afflicted with melancholia and was not responsible for his actions on the circumstance of his refusing to speak?—Partly, but only to a slight extent. Had he not met in his professional experiences with cases in which persons accused of crime preserved an obstinate and dogged silence for the express purpose of being considered insane and irresponsible?—Yes, there had been such cases. Scanty as was the evidence it occupied several hours. Counsel for the defence made an eloquent and impassioned defence on the plea of irresponsibility and insanity, and then the prosecuting counsel addressed the jury. He dealt in hard and plain facts; he spoke coldly and without passion; he refused to entertain the line of the defence, and said it was more than likely that the prisoner's demeanour proceeded from a cunning nature, and that he hoped by this means to escape the consequences of a ruthless murder committed in cold blood. The Judge, who said that there was no reason why the trial should not be concluded that night, and that the court would sit late to receive the verdict, summed up dead against the prisoner. Following in the train of the counsel for the Crown, he laid down the law in the clearest manner, and he directed the jury to consider certain issues and be guided by them, and to perform conscientiously the duty for which they were called together. At a quarter to ten o'clock the jury retired, and the Judge left the court, with directions that he should be called when the jury returned.

"It was at this stage of the inquiry that the case assumed a new aspect. Our reporter, Mr. Agnold, with whom our readers are acquainted, and to whom the public are indebted for the light thrown upon the Mystery of M. Felix, entered the court in the company of the young girl, Sophy, and immediately fell into earnest conversation with the counsel for the defence. Their conversation lasted a considerable time, during which the counsel took copious notes, breaking off occasionally to put questions to

Sophy, who answered them readily. Once the counsel turned Sophy's attention to the prisoner, and she moved towards him. He, turning, saw her, and greeted her with a smile of much sweetness, to which she pitifully responded. This sign of mutual recognition, indicating as it did an acquaintanceship between the prisoner and the young girl, heightened to fever-pitch the interest and excitement of the spectators, but before any explanation of the incident could be given, the return of the jury was announced. Almost at the same moment the Judge made his appearance. The names of the jury were about to be called out, when the counsel for the defence rose for the purpose of making a remark, but was desired by the Judge to resume his seat until the verdict of the jury was given.

"Counsel for the defence: 'If your lordship knew the importance of the observations I wish to make——'

"The Judge: 'I must request you to be seated until we have done with the jury. Then I will hear you.'

"The jury having answered to their names, were asked if they had agreed upon a verdict; whereupon the following conversation took place:

"The Foreman of the Jury: 'My lord, the jury wish me to say that they are morally convinced that the prisoner is not guilty.'

"The Judge: 'That is not a verdict. It is not a question of being morally convinced; it is a question of being legally convinced.'

"The Foreman: 'But the jury have the strongest moral doubts, my lord.'

"The Judge: 'They would not be sufficient to lead to a verdict. The doubts must be legal doubts. It is not for me to influence you one way or another. I have put the facts of the case before you, and it is upon those facts you must decide and pronounce your verdict.'

"The Foreman (after a brief consultation with his brother jurymen): 'Our verdict, my lord, is Not guilty.'

"The Judge: 'Upon what grounds have you arrived at your verdict?'

"The Foreman: 'Upon the grounds of moral conviction, my lord.'

"The Judge: 'It is my duty to tell you again that those

grounds are insufficient. Sentiment has nothing whatever to do with a criminal case. I must request you to retire and reconsider your verdict.'

"The Foreman: 'With all respect, my lord, it is useless. We have resolved to return no other verdict than the one we have given, and upon the grounds I have stated.'

"Several of the jury gave audible assent to their foreman's words.

"The Judge: 'I cannot receive your verdict, accompanied by your statement. You will retire and give the matter further consideration.'

"The Foreman: 'If we are locked up all night, my lord, we shall return no other verdict.'

"The Judge: 'I do not wish to be harsh or oppressive. Equally with yourselves I have a duty to perform. If you do not rightly comprehend any part of the evidence, say so, and I will explain it to you.'

"The Foreman: 'We have no doubts, my lord. We understand the evidence thoroughly.'

"The Judge: 'Or if you cannot agree——'

"The Foreman: 'We are thoroughly agreed, my lord.'

"The Judge: 'You will retire.'

"The jury were then conducted out of court.

"The Judge, addressing counsel for the defence: 'I am ready to hear you now.'

"Counsel: 'My lord, during your lordship's absence from court, while the jury were considering their verdict, the most important revelations have been made to me.'

"The Judge: 'Bearing upon this case?'

"Counsel: 'Bearing directly upon this case. Two persons are present now, who, if I had been able to call them, would have thrown an entirely different light upon the case. One of them is personally acquainted with the prisoner, the other does not know him personally, but knows his name.'

"The Judge: 'The Crown is not represented. The learned counsel is not in court. I cannot now hear statements from other persons; but you can go on with your statement. His name is known, you say?'

"Counsel: 'Yes, my lord. It is Gerald Paget.'

"At this mention of his name the prisoner became violently

agitated. His countenance was convulsed, and he stretched forth his arms, which trembled from excess of emotion.

"The Judge: 'The prisoner appears to be ill. Is there a doctor in court?'

"The prisoner (speaking for the first time): 'I am not ill. I must hear what he has to say.'

"Counsel: 'For nineteen years he has been supposed to be dead, and, in pursuance of a diabolical plot, has been confined in a private madhouse as another person. It is this cruel imprisonment which has reduced him to the condition in which we now see him.'

"The Judge: 'Your statement is an extraordinary one.'

"Counsel: 'I shall be able, my lord, to establish its truth. The strange story which has been revealed to me is too lengthy and complicated to narrate at this hour, but if your lordship will adjourn until to-morrow I undertake to prove the unfortunate prisoner's innocence, and also the guilt of the man who should now be standing in his place.'

"The Judge: 'Is the man known? Can he be found?'

"Counsel: 'He is known, and is now in prison under another charge which is directly connected with the murder for which the prisoner has been tried.'

"The Judge: 'If your statements are true the case is unprecedented.'

"Counsel: 'It is, my lord. The person who is guilty of the murder was the prisoner's keeper. There has hitherto been no identification of the murdered man; I am now in a position to prove who he was. He bore the name of Leonard Paget.'

"The Judge: 'Paget is the name of the prisoner.'

"Counsel: 'They were half brothers. There is a question of property involved.'

"An officer of the court here presented himself, and said that the jury wished to speak to the Judge.

"The Judge: 'Let them be brought in.'

"Upon this being done, the Judge asked the foreman what he had to say.

"The Foreman: 'It is simply, my lord, that there is not the remotest possibility of our returning any other verdict than that we have delivered, and in the precise terms in which we have de-

livered it. There is not the slightest difference of opinion between us ; we are absolutely unanimous.'

"The Judge: 'As I have already told you, it is no verdict. Officer, what is that noise?'

"Counsel: 'Witnesses from London have just arrived, my lord, who are ready to prove the truth of the statements I have made.'

"An extraordinary scene ensued. One of the newly-arrived witnesses was a lady, whose eyes travelled round the court, and finally rested upon the prisoner. In this lady our readers will have no difficulty in recognizing Emilia Paget. The moment she saw the prisoner a look of incredulous joy sprang into her eyes.

"'Merciful God!' she cried. 'Has the dead returned to life? Am I awake or dreaming?'

"The Prisoner, with a wild scream: 'Emilia!'

"Emilia: 'It is his voice! Gerald! Gerald!'

"She rushed to the prisoner, and no attempt was made to restrain her. Throwing her arms round his neck she drew his head down to her breast. Convulsive sobs shook their frames.

"Counsel, solemnly: 'My lord, this lady is the prisoner's husband whom she has mourned as dead for nineteen years.'

"The Foreman of the Jury: 'My lord, if anything was needed to prove the justice of our verdict, the proof is now supplied.'

"The Judge: 'You are discharged. The court is adjourned. Remove the prisoner.'

"Counsel: 'My lord, my lord! May not this afflicted couple be allowed a few minutes' intercourse?'

"The Judge: 'I leave it to the discretion of the officers in charge of the prisoner.'

"Counsel: 'Direct them, my lord. Say that it may be allowed.'

"The Judge: 'It may be allowed. But all the persons not directly concerned in this unparalleled case must retire.'

"Slowly and reluctantly the spectators left the court in a state of indescribable excitement."

CHAPTER LX.

ROBERT AGNOLD'S LAST WORDS.

I RESUME and conclude the Mystery of M. Felix in my own person. What transpired after the incidents of that exciting night is soon related. Before Gerald Paget was released Dr. Peterssen was put on his trial for the murder. The minor charge of his attempt upon Sophy's life and mine was set aside, and was only incidentally referred to in the evidence and speech of the prosecuting counsel. Guilt was never more clearly proved than his. The revolver with which the murder was committed was the same he had purloined from the rooms in Gerrard Street, when he sent Mrs. Middlemore upon a false errand to the Bow Street Police Court. On this head Mrs. Middlemore's evidence was valuable; but my evidence on the point was still more valuable. The initial "F." I had scratched on the metal, and the entry I had made in my pocket-book, "A Colt's double-action revolver, nickel-plated, 6 shots, No. 819," enabled me to swear positively to the weapon. Peterssen's own confession of guilt to me when Sophy and I were imprisoned in the cavern in Deering Woods was fatal, and Sophy, who was one of the two heroines of this celebrated trial, won the admiration of all England by the manner in which she gave her evidence. It was imperative that Emilia should be called, and she narrated with great feeling all the circumstances of her brief but fateful acquaintance with Peterssen during the honeymoon tour in Switzerland. There was found upon Peterssen a large sum of money in bank notes, and the manager of the bank in which the murdered man, under the name of M. Felix, kept his account, proved, by the numbers on the notes, that they had been paid to Peterssen's victim across the bank counter. Another witness called was George Street's father, upon whom Peterssen had so long and so successfully imposed. He testified that Gerald Paget was not his son, and said that on every occasion on which he desired to see the patient Peterssen had declared that a fatal result would be the certain result of an interview. Gerald Paget was brought into court, but he was so weak and ill that his evidence could not be taken. The case, however, was complete without him. There was practically no defence; the jury debated for a few minutes only, and

brought in a verdict of guilty ; the villain was sentenced, and he paid the penalty of his crimes. For Leonard Paget, alias M. Felix, no pity was expressed ; the fate he had met with was richly deserved.

Needless to say that the case excited immense interest, and it was universally admitted that its sensational disclosures were without parallel in the history of crime. I may mention that Crawley was not traced ; up to this day he has succeeded in concealing himself ; but his hour will come.

After all was said and done, I think that Sophy held rank as *the* heroine of the Mystery. A daily paper suggested that a subscription should be got up for her ; to this suggestion practical effect was given, and money flowed in from all ranks and classes of people. Close upon a thousand pounds were subscribed ; so Sophy is rich. Fame has not turned her head. She said to me but yesterday, "I ain't proud ; not a bit of it. Whenever you want me, Mr. Agnold, you'll find me ready." In time she will improve in her language, and one day she may be really a lady.

The words Sophy addressed to me were spoken in Geneva, where these lines are being written. The wedding of Constance Paget and M. Julian Bordier took place yesterday, and we were invited to it. The father of the bride was present. The rescue from his living tomb, the new and happier life, and the care and devotion of his wife Emilia, upon whose sweet face he never tires of gazing, has already brought about a great change for the better, and confident hopes are entertained that before long his reason will be permanently restored. It is pleasant to be able to record that the kind and skilful oculist who had given evidence in what I may call the marriage certificate case has made a cure of M. Julian Bordier. He can see, and the terror of blindness no longer afflicts him.

This morning the oculist (who gave himself a week's holiday to attend the wedding) and I had a chat about M. Felix, whose supposed death in Gerrard Street, Soho, caused so great a sensation. He has been hunting up cases of suspended animation, and he read to me half a dozen, each of which lasted for a much longer time than M. Felix's. Since Peterssen's trial there has been a great deal written in newspapers and magazines concerning these instances of apparent death, and wonder has been expressed that, upon M. Felix's disappearance, no one thought

it was likely that he had gone through such an experience. My answer to this expression of wonder is that it is easy to be wise after the event.

While we were engaged in our conversation, the oculist and I were sitting at a window of the house which Constance and her husband are to occupy when they return from their honeymoon. The window overlooks a garden in which Emilia and Gerald are walking.

"A good and sweet woman," said the oculist, smiling at Emilia, who had looked up and smiled at us. "She deserves happiness."

"She will have it," I said. "The clouds have disappeared from her life. Her trials are over."

THE END.

Lines for Music.

By the Author of "MISS MOLLY."

LOVE paused once by my side,
And took my hand in his ;
I did not note his folded wings,
I only felt his kiss.

His feet kept pace with mine,
His voice was soft and low ;
Over our heads the leafy boughs
Moved softly to and fro.

Between me and the sun
There came a tiny shade,
I saw 'twas Love's unfolded wings,
And wept, and was afraid.

He said, " No need to fear,
For even when Love has flown,
Those who once here have walked with him
Are never more alone."

They may forget his face,
But, even when all is well,
They never quite forget the tones
In which he said " Farewell ! "

A Woman's Heart.

By MRS. ALEXANDER,

Author of "THE WOOLING O'T," "BY WOMAN'S WIT," "A LIFE INTEREST,"
"A FALSE SCENT," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE "TIMES."

WHILE this conversation was engrossing Lill and her good protectress in their cosy sitting-room looking on the back garden, where some thorn bushes were beginning to show a faint attempt at green, Aunt Tony, who had not yet recovered from her disturbance of the night before, was called from her occupations in larder and kitchen by the girl, who rushed in open-mouthed. "Lor', 'm! here's the same gentleman as was here last night—that's him!" as a furious ringing of the door bell ensued.

"Leave him to me," said Mrs. Holden defiantly. She made a swift retreat into a little back parlour she kept for herself, snatched some letters from a drawer and thrust them into the pocket of her capacious print apron; then she went rapidly upstairs, and opening the door wide, confronted the applicant with an air which said, "Come in if you dare." A tall, distinguished-looking man, with light, angry eyes and a haggard, furious countenance, turned to face her.

"Can I see Mrs. Holden?" he asked with more composure than his looks promised.

"I am Mrs. Holden," still standing in the doorway.

"Can you give me Mrs. Repton's address?"

"No, I can't."

"You probably do not know who I am?"

"I do; Lord de Walden."

"Then you can have no objection to give me the information."

"I have—or rather I would have every objection if I knew where she was, but I don't. She has never put her foot across this threshold since she left me over two years ago, except once she got in by accident, the day she stole your son."

Lord de Walden stared at her, too much surprised by her tone and aspect to reply. Mrs. Holden went on: "About a week ago she had the impudence to send me this note—these letters came for her since. Perhaps you know the writing," and she took them from her pocket.

"It is mine," he exclaimed, holding out his hand.

"There, then, take them all—that's the only information I can give you. I know nothing about my niece, and I don't want to know anything."

De Walden took the letters with a dazed look, and turned to descend the steps; then pausing, again faced Mrs. Holden.

"If she comes," he said in a hoarse, unsteady voice, "let her stay, were it only twenty-four hours, and tell her she is mistaken, quite mistaken—I have done what she wished. I wanted to surprise her—beg her to write——"

"She won't show her face here, I can tell you," interrupted Mrs. Holden, retreating into her castle, and as de Walden, his head bent and an inexpressible air of hopelessness pervading his whole figure, descended the steps, she banged the door and rushed, trembling with excitement, to describe the interview to Mrs. Stepney and Lill.

* * * * *

Quite unconscious of this undercurrent, which yet was of immense importance to her fortunes, Claire de Walden spent a tranquil day. A curious, sweet sense of security grew upon her as she thought of Stephen Ferrars—of the quiet depth of his devotion to herself. There was nothing in its regulated force to alarm or distress her now that the first shock of knowing *how* he loved her was over. He was a potent friend, on whose prudence and self-control she could implicitly rely. So far she was strengthened and upheld for the present; from contemplating the future she shrank with a strange thrill—half fear, half pleasure.

As is natural to a generous, unselfish nature, the consciousness of her own wealth in the possession of such a friend as Ferrars suggested sympathy for those who were less fortunate. "I have not seen poor little Lill for a long time," she thought. "What a lonely little waif she would be if that kind Mrs. Stepney had not in a way adopted her. I must go and see them," an intention she fulfilled that afternoon, spending nearly two hours in the studio.

Observing that Lill was rather nervous and depressed, and

Mrs. Stepney preoccupied, she exerted herself to rouse and amuse them. Rarely had she seemed so charming—there was so much gentle sympathy in her voice and manner, so much affectionate interest in her talk about the plans and projects of her friends.

"Well," said Mrs. Stepney when she had left them, "that such a woman should be given to a man who could desert her, and for *such* a rival, is indeed a throwing of pearls before swine."

"I fear," thought Claire, "those dear things are in some trouble or difficulty. I wish I knew; I might be able to help them."

The morning but one after, Claire woke early and her first thought was to wonder if Ferrars had returned the previous night, as he said he would. If so, would he call that day?

On entering the dining-room she found a letter from her brother regretting the impossibility of leaving his parish at that time, but imploring her to pause before launching upon the unholy course of suing for a divorce.

"I must ask Stephen to write to him," she thought, as she slowly replaced the letter in its envelope. Her brother's opposition was a source of profound mortification to her, though he in no way influenced her mind.

The weather being so mild, General Granard joined his daughter at breakfast and gossiped pleasantly over the news he had heard the previous day, or gleaned from the paper as he ate his kedgeree and sipped his coffee. Leaving her father to grumble and "pooh-pooh" over his son's letter, Claire went to interview Mrs. Gregg on the important question of dinner, and had hardly finished when Stubbs brought a small parcel and a note; the writing was strange to her.

"DEAR LADY DE WALDEN,—" it ran, "I earnestly hope you will not think me presumptuous or intrusive, in sending you the accompanying *Times*. It is possible you do not look at the 'births, deaths, &c.' or if you do the names might not strike you, so I venture to call your attention to what is probably of importance to you. The paper was directed to me in a business-like but unknown hand, and the announcement was marked as you see; it reached me by the last post yesterday. I have only to add that 'Gustavus Dalton' is my brother.

"Yours very truly,

"E. STEPNEY."

With keen curiosity Claire opened the little packet, for the newspaper was completely inclosed, and glancing at the first column read the announcement, which was marked with a large cross in ink. "Dalton, Holden—On the 21st instant, at St. Philip's, Paddington, by the Rev. C. Calvert, Gustavus Dalton, esq., of Park Lane and Dalton's Run, South Australia, to Eva, only daughter of the late John Holden, formerly of Wanganui, New Zealand. Australian papers please copy."

For a moment the names did not suggest the reality to Claire. Then it all broke upon her; "Eva" was Mrs. Repton, who only used her family name in the announcement to avoid the evil reputation clinging round that of Repton. Then she had left Lord de Walden! He was alone! How would that affect her boy—herself?

The wildest terror seized her soul. Nothing, nothing could ever fill the ghastly gulf which yawned between her and the husband she had once loved so well. Yet this amazing and most unexpected marriage added new and peculiar difficulties to the situation. Had Stephen Ferrars any idea of this extraordinary event? She must tell him; she must fly to him before any one else knew. How could she bear to speak to her father until she had gathered some counsel, some strength, some comfort from Ferrars? Had he returned? She must go and find out for herself. Hastily putting on outdoor attire and a thick veil, she told Stubbs she would not be long away, and sallied forth, and hailing a cab ordered the driver to Brook Street. The way seemed at once long and short; her head and heart were over-crowded.

"Has Mr. Ferrars returned?" she asked of the stately old butler, who had known Stephen as a boy.

"Oh, yes, my lady; Mr. Ferrars returned about half-past ten last night," and the major-domo set wide both sides of the entrance door in honour of the visitor, whom he knew well.

"If Mr. Ferrars is disengaged I wish to see him."

"Certainly, my lady, please to come this way."

He led her up the first flight of the broad sombre staircase, and threw open a door which led from it into a handsome, comfortable study, where Ferrars sat writing, and announced with unction, "Lady de Walden."

"Claire!" cried Ferrars in great surprise, and starting up to meet her. "What—what has happened?"

"Read that," she returned, showing him the paper she had held all the way in her hand, folded at the column she wished him to see.

They stood together while he read the announcement aloud.

"It is almost incredible," he exclaimed after a moment's pause. "But can this Eva be Mrs. Repton?"

"She is; look at this note from Mrs. Stepney—who lives in the aunt's house—there can be no doubt."

"Why, Dalton is the rich Australian who bought my yacht—who was such a crack rider. What an unutterable idiot the man must be."

"But, Stephen, do you understand the horror of it? Lord de Walden, deserted and alone, may want *me* to return to him. He may want his son. It may be infinitely more difficult for me to gain my suit when the cause of offence is removed. Stephen," laying both her hands on his arm, "you will not let him claim me; you will stand between me and such a horrible fate?"

Ferrars looked down at her for an instant with a swift passionate glance, and she felt the shiver of intense feeling which passed through his frame.

"Do you think it necessary to ask that question, Claire? Believe me, your position is not altered. If de Walden had put away this woman of his own free will, in order to reconcile himself to you, the lawyers might get some capital out of it, but she has deserted him, nor can he do away with the fact of his own cruel and heartless desertion, in spite of your wifely appeals. No, dear Claire, be true to yourself, act as if this piece of information had never reached you, and all will go well. Sit down; you are trembling, you can hardly stand. My God! I would give years of my life to save you this suffering; do you believe me, Claire?"

"I do; I believe in you utterly," she returned, raising her eyes with such an imploring glance that he could hardly resist the impulse to clasp her in his arms.

"You have spirit and resolution," he said, averting his eyes, "and you are, if you choose, mistress of the situation. This unusual terror does not show the strength I know you have."

"It is an indescribable terror; something quite new to me. I distrust myself. I fear that considerations connected with my son may be forced upon me. He ought to be my paramount

consideration. Why—why should I martyrize myself for a man that tortured me as my husband did?"

"No just judge could expect such a sacrifice. Great as your horror of renewing the old tie has been, I did not think the very faint possibility of such a fate would so upset your equilibrium."

"Yes, I am upset, bewildered," cried Claire, and throwing back her veil she suddenly rose, and, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, added in broken tones; "for now I know that half my dread of Lord de Walden is dread of losing *you*!"

"Claire!" exclaimed Ferrars drawing quickly to her side. "Can I believe this? Is it possible that my profound love has at last touched you?"

"I did not know it—not quite—till this terrible possibility confronted me, and now I know that I love you well; not in the feverish half-frightened way I once loved, but gently, deeply, with all the calm fulness of maturity. Yet, Stephen," giving him her hand, which he kissed tenderly, and then held against his strongly-beating heart, "my son must always be first with me."

"I know it, Claire; I admire you for it, and I love the boy myself. Hereafter——"

"Oh, Stephen, let us not dare to think of the future—at present it is wrapped in clouds and thick darkness—we must wait; only I am oppressed with a terrible fear that I may bring you more sorrow than joy."

"That cannot be, Claire, so long as you are true to the affection you have confessed; everything seems possible since you said you loved me. Life, the whole world, has a new aspect."

"But I am sad and frightened. Will you come back with me and tell all this—I mean about that dreadful woman's marriage? I do not seem able to do anything alone."

"Yes, of course; and then I shall go on to Briggs and warn him to listen to no advances from the opposite party. I suspect Gould, who is, you know, an old and devoted adherent of the de Waldens, will be making some attempt to patch matters up, but you must be——"

What, he never said, for the dignified butler entered, bearing a salver on which lay a card.

"I told the gentleman you were engaged, sir, but he begged me to take in his card and ask if you would be so good as to say when you would see him. I've put him in the library, sir."

"Very well. I will come in a few minutes." Then as the servant retired he continued, "It is Mr. Gould, Claire. Suppose you wait here until I hear what he has to say ; I will not let him stay long."

"Yes ; I am very curious to know the object of his visit."

"Then rest in this armchair. I hardly like to leave you alone." With lingering hand-pressure he went away.

Ferrars found a tall, thin, well-preserved, elderly man standing on the hearthrug. He was well and fashionably dressed, and wore double glasses dangling over his waistcoat, looking, from his slightly bald crown to his neat highly-polished boots, a first-class professional man.

Ferrars bowed silently, and left the initiative to his visitor.

"I have first to apologize for intruding upon you, Mr. Ferrars, instead of addressing you through your solicitor, but I trust my motive will be my excuse. You are probably aware that I was the late Lord de Walden's legal adviser, and take more than ordinary professional interest in my present client, his son."

"Yes, Mr. Gould, I am well aware that Lord de Walden had great confidence in you, and I may say that we all regret he did not listen to the counsels we feel sure you offered. Pray sit down, I am quite willing to listen to anything you have to say."

"Thank you. You must be aware how deeply concerned we, my partner and myself, have been at the late deplorable condition of things ; anything more unexpected and unfortunate could hardly have occurred. Now a gleam of hope has broken on the present dreary outlook. The source of all the mischief has left Lord de Walden ; she came up to London about ten days ago, giving as her address the house of a relative who was, she said, ill. Lord de Walden sent several letters to her but received no reply. On Sunday last he had a short note from the lady, in which she stated that his evident reluctance to take the step she advised (to remove his son from the mother's guardianship) proved his indifference, and she was determined not to return to him. Lord de Walden rushed to town and endeavoured to trace her. He was with me on Monday and was more like a maniac than a responsible being. Yesterday he sent for me to his hotel, and showed me the announcement in the *Times* of the lady's marriage with Mr. Dalton, the Australian, of whom you have no doubt heard."

Ferrars bent his head.

"I have seen the announcement you mention, and with great surprise ; I did not think Mrs. Repton would have relinquished her prey so readily."

"Nor should I. But, you see, Mr. Dalton was able to marry her on the spot, whereas it rested with his wife whether Lord de Walden would ever be free to do so. There had evidently been a struggle between his lordship and this woman over the question of the guardianship of the boy, and Lord de Walden's tardy sense of justice made him reluctant to claim it, but Mrs. Repton's influence prevailed. Though he did not tell her, he wrote instructions to us to claim the boy a few days before she (Mrs. Repton) made her mysterious excursion to London."

"She has then over-reached herself?" said Ferrars.

"As regards Lord de Walden, yes ; but she has done well for herself in securing so wealthy a husband as Dalton, who must have married her with his eyes open. Lord de Walden is in a pitiable state. We instituted a few inquiries for him and found that the happy couple started at once for Southampton, and sailed on Saturday evening for America, or some distant destination, in Dalton's yacht, 'The Siren.'"

"Well, the fugitive fair one is pretty safe from molestation," said Ferrars with a sneer. "These particulars are interesting, but it remains to be explained why you have done me the favour of explaining them personally to me."

"I should imagine you must have some idea, Mr. Ferrars. The present is an important crisis. Freed from the evil influence of this designing woman, the friends of both Lord and Lady de Walden may possibly be enabled to bring about a reconciliation between them, and restore my unfortunate client to the companionship of his wife, to respectability, and save the scandal of the suit for divorce. As your near relationship and close intimacy with both parties point you out as the most suitable intermediary, I venture to entreat your co-operation in this good work."

"You mean, to induce Lady de Walden to forego her suit and take back her repentant husband ; repentant only because his mistress has forsaken him for a richer man. No, Mr. Gould, I utterly refuse to offer any such advice to Lady de Walden."

"Then her husband will go rapidly to the dogs. He has already shown an inclination to stimulants, which is calculated

to cause grave uneasiness ; his associates are by no means of a kind suited to his rank and standing, and—— ”

“ And because, after breaking up her home and destroying her happiness, he displays these worthless propensities, his wife is to sacrifice herself and submit to the unspeakable degradation of accepting him once more as a husband.”

“ A woman of Lady de Walden's high character will submit to great sacrifices in order to rehabilitate a husband and re-create a home for her son, to whose childish memory the present unfortunate state of affairs will not present any distinct picture. It is a work worthy of a pious mind.”

“ That may be ; but I will never advise Lady de Walden to undertake it. My own opinion is that *nothing* will arrest de Walden's downward progress. He might, in the rebound caused by disgust at his mistress's treachery, he might live cleanly and decently for some months, but a repetition of his glaring infidelity would be sure to occur, and then what would his wife's position be, cut off by her own act of condonation from all chance of deliverance from such degrading companionship ? No, Mr. Gould ; neither General Granard nor I will ever listen to such a proposition. Lord de Walden chose his own line with the most reckless disregard of his wife's happiness, the most shameless indifference to his honour and his character. Why should others show him more consideration than he did to himself ? ”

“ I am sorry, then, I intruded upon you,” said Mr. Gould somewhat stiffly, and rising as if he considered the interview at an end.

“ I beg you will not say so, Mr. Gould. I fully appreciate your regard for your client's best interests, and respect your effort to serve him. I am not sorry to have this opportunity of avowing frankly my opposition to the scheme of reconciling de Walden to his sorely injured wife.”

“ You act, no doubt, according to the best of your judgment, Mr. Ferrars, but I do not yet despair of accomplishing my ardent desire of seeing husband and wife once more united.”

“ Time will show,” said Ferrars as he rang the bell, and then followed his visitor politely to the door.

“ Have I exhausted your patience, Claire ? ” he exclaimed when he returned to his study, where he found her in precisely the same place and position as when he left—one hand grasping the

arm of the chair, the other holding the paper, her eyes strained with an expression of mingled fear and distress.

"Oh, no, no, Stephen! I will try to be resolute and patient, and give as little trouble as I can. I have unavoidably given too much," she said starting up, as if released from a spell. "What did Mr. Gould say?"

Ferrars repeated the substance of their conversation.

"I knew it would be so; every one will now set upon me to withdraw my suit. But I will not. Oh, no! I have right on my side. There was a time I would have forgiven much, though I could never have forgotten. Now I must think of my self-respect, and—— You are right, Stephen, it would be the same history over again, only I should be helpless. Let us go to my father," she continued feverishly; "he ought to be told."

"Can you not spare me a few moments, Claire?" he returned, approaching and resting one knee on the chair near which she stood. "I want to hear you say once more, 'I love you.' Have you the faintest idea of what they mean to me—the intoxication, the satisfying of a soul-hunger that has consumed me for years? No! divided as your heart is by your mother-love, you cannot dream what force, what intensity, is concentrated in the only love of my whole life. It is so true, that far from chafing at your affection for your boy I admire you for it; it draws my heart to *him* too."

Claire, who had listened with her eyes upraised to his, felt the tears gather in them as she turned from the passionate yearning of his.

"I wish I had not told you, Stephen," she said in a low tone; "but it does not matter much, you would have found it out. Ah! it is unfortunate for yourself, dear—that you learned to care for me. You would be better, and happier, with some bright young creature who had no sad history like mine behind her. I almost shrink from myself for having listened to you, for having let myself love you, but it grew without my knowledge. Oh, Stephen! let us try to be friends only—for a while longer—till time and circumstances decide the future for us."

"So far as outer seeming goes, yes; but you and I, dearest—we must always know how strong, how close, the tie is that binds us. I will not vex you by dwelling on my own feelings. I

understand the reticence you wish for ; your wish is law, my love, my queen."

"Thank you! Oh, Stephen! I feel that my life is gone from my grasp."

"It is but an exchange," he returned ; "you hold mine." There was a moment's silence.

"You will come with me to my father?" said Lady de Walden.

Ferrars roused himself with a deep sigh, and, kissing her hand with tender deference, he walked to the fireplace and rang to ask if the carriage he had ordered to be brought round was at the door.

General Granard was beginning to wonder what had become of his daughter, when she returned, accompanied by Ferrars. The latter at once showed the startling announcement which had so changed the face of affairs.

"By George! this is an extraordinary business. The hussey has cut de Walden for a free man. What an infernal idiot he must be. Gad! this beats cock-fighting. Let me look at it again. Are you sure this 'Eva' is the 'Repton?'"

"Yes, quite sure. I have just seen Gould, de Walden's man of business," and Ferrars proceeded to describe the interview. When he ceased speaking the general turned to his daughter exclaiming, "I trust and hope, Claire, you will not listen to any nonsense, either from de Walden or his employés. There is every probability that now he is deserted and in a devil of a temper, he will fall back on you ; if you listen to him you will be an idiot of the first water."

"I do not think Lady de Walden deserves such an epithet," said Ferrars with a frown. It always irritated him when General Granard spoke roughly to Claire.

"I am not inclined to listen to any proposal of reconciliation," she returned, looking up from the perusal of a letter she had found awaiting her. "But I feel quite sure none will come from Lord de Walden. It would be almost absurdly shameless on his part. I have a letter here from my brother—two whole sheets—exhorting me to renounce the blasphemous project of breaking through the holy sacrament of marriage. I am so sorry to be obliged to go against him, but when one of the contracting parties has so desecrated the solemn engagement, I cannot see that it is binding on the other. The holiness of marriage depends on the persons who

marry ; it is considerably more a civil than a religious matter, but none the less binding. God knows it is the very keystone of society."

"Oh! William *must* uphold the opinions of his order. He is all right, but of course you'll not mind what he says. I am glad you take a sensible view of the subject. I daresay it is chiefly owing to *your* good advice, Ferrars."

Lady de Walden's pale cheek flushed quickly at these words, but her father took no notice.

"Ring the bell, Ferrars ; I fancy luncheon ought to be ready. To think of that jade leaving de Walden in the lurch, and drawing a lucky number into the bargain. Well—serve him right !"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

A STRANGE, troubled, yet delicious week succeeded. Claire rarely saw Ferrars alone, and not a word of love passed between them, but a sense of complete mutual understanding made words unnecessary—a glance, a smile, a hand-pressure conveyed all they wished to each other—and how heavenly sweet was this silent intercourse. Yet it could not shut out from Claire's heart an uneasy fear of what lay behind the curtain of the future. She did not anticipate any attempt on Lord de Walden's part towards a reconciliation—but she felt that the fact of his being free from the companionship of his mistress might make her right to freedom, and to her son, less indisputable. Even her own solicitor, who had formerly urged her to proceed against her husband, now counselled patience and readiness to hear "what the opposite party had to say," at least until he found how furiously Mr. Ferrars was opposed to this advice, for Mr. Ferrars was not to be lightly contradicted.

So matters were externally little changed since Claire had given distinct instructions to her solicitor for the commencement of her suit, but a strong undercurrent had set in and she waited in nervous expectation for what time would bring forth. It soothed her to talk to Mrs. Stepney, whose mature experience made her a more suitable companion than her slighter and less thoughtful young *protégée*. Indeed Lill was, at this period, exceedingly

variable and illogical, sometimes furiously industrious, sometimes absolutely idle and dreamy.

Mrs. Stepney was profoundly distressed to find her brother had linked himself indissolubly to such a woman as Mrs. Repton, and spoke freely of her fears to Lady de Walden.

"I don't consider his life safe with such an unscrupulous creature," she said one afternoon when Lady de Walden had called at Raby Villa. "If there was anything to be gained, anything to be concealed, by his death, she would dexterously put him out of the way."

"I do not suppose she would go quite so far; but I am truly sorry for the annoyance such a marriage must be to you, my dear Mrs. Stepney. And to think that he knew who and what she was!"

"Amazing, is it not? Well! I suppose I shall never see my brother again, for I will never cross the threshold of a house where *she* is mistress. I should not be a bit surprised if she made a place for herself in London society yet."

"Could that be possible?" exclaimed Claire, and a short silence ensued. Then they spoke of Lill's engagement—in which Lady de Walden took a warm interest. Mrs. Stepney brightened up as she spoke of it, and said they hoped the wedding would take place in June, and that the happy pair were to settle in London, in the near neighbourhood of the studio, Mrs. Stepney undertaking some of the trouble and responsibility of furnishing and making so far ready, that the young couple might finish their "plenishing" at leisure. It was a happy ending for the homeless little waif, "and," concluded Mrs. Stepney, "believe me, as the wife of the man she loves with all her heart, Lill will be a new creature. I may start her 'in the way she should go,' but I am quite prepared to leave her to her own devices within six months."

"They will not let you go, if they are wise," said Lady de Walden.

The sudden appearance of Mrs. Holden interrupted them. "If you please, Mrs. Stepney——" she began; then seeing Lady de Walden she grew very red and murmured: "Oh! I'm sure I beg your pardon," and beat a rapid retreat.

"Poor Mrs. Holden can never bring herself to face you."

"That is foolish, but not unnatural," returned Claire. "What a misfortune to be so nearly related to so unscrupulous a woman."

How strange it seems to look back and remember that I lived in the same house with her, and learned from the same teachers—that I even rather liked my handsome schoolfellow, and thought Frau von Biederman was somewhat severe and prejudiced against her.”

Soon after, Lady de Walden left, walking slowly towards home and resting her heart by thinking of Lill's prospects and what would be the most suitable and useful present for her.

* * * * *

Easter was now close at hand, and the terrible ordeal of the divorce suit would follow almost immediately. How Claire shrank from the hideous publicity !

In spite of good old Mr. Briggs' assurance that, as the action would scarcely be opposed, there would be none of the degrading display which usually attends a *cause célèbre*, her restless imagination would present her with painful pictures of her own presence in court and of the insolent questions of cross-examining counsel, in spite all Ferrars could say as to the extreme improbability of her being obliged to appear.

The general was cheerful and unmoved. Of course the suit would go in his daughter's favour. She would remain Lady de Walden, with the guardianship of her son and a good income. She would, with her usual prudence, like to live near him, keeping under his protection ; indeed, he might get her a suite of rooms in the same house—there was some talk of the people on the second floor leaving—and it would be exceedingly agreeable to have her close by and yet have his own premises free from the racket of that boy. “A fine little fellow ; all one could wish, of course, but deuced noisy, I can tell you.”

“Man proposes” might well be written across these projects with a wide blank beyond for the ultimate disposition of fate.

The morning after the above-mentioned visit, as Claire and her father were discussing whether they should or should not go for the Easter holidays to Bournemouth, to which plan she was averse, being nervously timid about leaving London till her fate was decided, Ferrars came hastily into the room, as if he had been in too great haste to wait for Stubbs to announce him. His face was dark and colourless, and his whole bearing and expression denoted strong emotion.

“What is the matter, Stephen ?” cried Claire starting up and

going to meet him, while the general exclaimed: "What's wrong?"

"Bad news," said Ferrars quickly but distinctly. "De Walden had an awful spill yesterday. There is scarcely any hope of his life."

Claire clasped her hands and sank into the nearest chair, as if struck.

"Good God! how did it happen?" asked General Granard.

"No one knows exactly. Gould came to me an hour ago. They had telegraphed to him from Dormer Castle late yesterday, after he had left his office, to say that de Walden 'had had a bad fall and was dying.' This morning he had a letter from the local doctor saying that the unfortunate fellow was in a very critical condition and might go off at any moment, but he was partially conscious, and had asked for Ferrars."

"And you are going?" cried Claire, starting up again.

"Of course. I have snatched a moment to tell you. I am now on my way to King's Cross to catch the midday train. I shall not reach Castle Dormer till nearly seven, but I trust I shall be in time to hear anything he may wish to say."

"It is too dreadful," said the general, much moved.

"I do not seem able to think," whispered Claire, steadying herself by leaning on the table, for she was trembling almost too much to stand. "Stephen, if he wishes to see his boy—if he cares to see me—if—if there is time—telegraph. I will come at once," and a merciful rush of tears came to her relief. "I would do anything to save his life—to save him from suffering." Ferrars looked at her with infinite compassion, even while his brows contracted.

"Try to keep up, dear Claire. Trust me. I will do all man can to help and to save him. I have sent for Sir James Paton. He goes down this evening. If any one can save him Paton will."

"God bless you, Ferrars. Let us know how matters are as soon as possible," said the general, shaking hands with him. Claire followed him into the entrance hall.

"Claire," whispered Ferrars, "this is a tremendous ordeal for both of us. I see cruel possibilities on one side, a bitter grief on the other. Try not to let your judgment be swept away by an overstrained idea of self-sacrifice. Remember you hold my life in your hands."

"Ah! Stephen, mine is bound in yours. Let us try to do right."

"Yes—what is really right." He pressed her hand almost painfully hard and went swiftly away.

Lady de Walden went slowly back to the drawing-room and stood still and silent, her hands clasped and dropped before her, striving to think—to understand the strange turn events had taken.

"Claire, my poor girl, don't stand looking so dazed and miserable," said her father kindly. "I'll get you a glass of wine. You must remember it is the will of God, and it is a good thing that woman had cleared out. She would have complicated matters confoundedly. Here, Stubbs; get the sherry. Hadn't you better send for the boy?—to have him at hand in case——"

"Yes, yes, dear father; it is well thought of. Will you write? and send Collins. I am not able to do anything. I must go to my room, and think, and pray."

"Do then, my dear, if you will not take a glass of wine."

"No, no! some water—my head feels burning—you will write about Gerald, dearest father," and she turned away to the silence and solitude of her own room, where, throwing herself on the sofa, she buried her head in the cushions, and gave herself up to the agonizing mixture of remembered tenderness, present bitterness, grief and deep compassion.

Was he, indeed, near death? Her strong, handsome husband, who was so full of life, so quick to enjoy!—who had first taught her what love was, as well as what cruellest grief was. Was he doomed to death so soon? She had never wished him to suffer, only her heart had grown cold and indifferent. Oh, would he die without seeing his boy once more? He might not care to see *her*, but surely he would think of Gerald.

How, in the presence of the great King, all feelings, save awe and pardon, were silenced and dwarfed! And yet, even while she forgave, she shrank from seeing her lost love again. It would be as painful as if she were to meet a spirit she had once fondly admired, now fallen from its first estate and incarnated in some base form. But Guy would not die. Men survived terrible accidents. Medical, surgical skill, could call back sufferers from the gates of death; and Guy was so full to the lips with life, surely he might recover.

If he did, would not the desertion of that woman, the enforced quiet and thoughtfulness of convalescence, show him the folly and degradation of his later life? Then, when he—when they were both free, he might marry some respectable woman, who would understand him better than she did, and his home might be fit for Gerald to enter. Ought she herself to be that woman? No! a thousand times, no! The infidelity she might have forgiven; but the infinite injustice of breaking up her home, of throwing her on her father for sustenance, of attempting to take her son, all at the suggestion of a strange woman, in order to force her to seek for the divorce de Walden himself could not demand—this roused a degree of scorn in which love withered, struck dead with the palsy of contempt. No; she could never return to Lord de Walden, nor would he ever ask. Knowing the man as she now did, she felt convinced that he would avoid a meeting as carefully as she would herself.

How thankful she was that Ferrars could and would go to the sufferer. Ferrars would do all that was best and wisest. How would it all end?

“The day drags on, though storms keep out the sun”—and this most dreary day dragged its heavy length somehow to the end.

About nine o'clock a telegram from Ferrars arrived. “He still lives, and is not suffering so much. He recognized me, but has not spoken. Paton cannot be here before ten.”

The next day brought a long letter to the general, from which they gathered that Lord de Walden had started in the forenoon to ride a new hunter, a powerful, ill-tempered chestnut, which he had lately purchased. The groom who usually followed him was ready, but de Walden forbade his attendance. He had a battle with the chestnut at the outset, but he was one of the best riders in England, and mastered the animal. The next his household saw of their lord was some hours after, when his bruised and bleeding form was carried home by a party of labourers, under the direction of a farmer in the neighbourhood. This man had been driving back from market when, in a by-road, he came upon Lord de Walden's apparently lifeless body lying under an ox-fence, the rails of which were broken, and the road marked by struggling hoofs. It was evident that de Walden had forced his horse to attempt the leap; a wide ox-fence, taken unwillingly, had been but partially cleared, and horse and rider had come

down together on the hard road. In his struggles to rise the horse had kicked or otherwise injured his rider, and until the doctor examined him and declared life not extinct, the frightened servants thought he was dead. The horse was caught some miles away, somewhat scratched by the broken timber, but otherwise uninjured.

There was no one in the house with any authority to act. Since his return from London Lord de Walden had been quite alone, spending his days in long, solitary rides across country, "bringing home his horses," the groom said, "in a state of dirt and distress which proved how recklessly he had ridden."

The butler, an elderly man of some experience, telegraphed to his master's solicitors, when, after the local doctor had administered restoratives and brought back the sufferer to life, he murmured the name of "Ferrars," at which the much-bewildered valet-ocracy caught, as at a possible head or director, and lost no time in reporting the same to Messrs. Gould and Fenton.

Then came Sir James Paton's report. There was no immediate danger of death. Lord de Walden might linger a considerable time. He might even partially recover; but the horse in its struggles to rise had inflicted some injuries on the spine which forbade all hope that the patient could ever walk again. He—Sir James—would return in a week, and had given, meantime, ample instructions to the doctor in attendance.

Meantime, de Walden recovered sufficiently to be able to speak with Ferrars at intervals. He was chiefly anxious that a recent will of his should be destroyed. He had made no mention either of his wife or son, so as yet Claire did not deem it expedient to intrude herself or Gerald on her husband. In subsequent letters Ferrars mentioned that de Walden's ruling desire was to return to Beaumont Royal—which was now vacant—"to die there," he said. But, Ferrars added, that in a way he was certainly gaining ground, though perhaps life, in his case, was a more cruel sentence than death.

It was a terrible time of trial. With all her sympathy for the sufferer and earnest wish for his relief, Claire's mind was greatly exercised by the change this untoward event had created in her position.

To bring a suit for divorce against a poor, crushed, maimed creature—who in his earliest prime was doomed either to death

or to hopeless inaction, even more terrible than death itself—would be impossible.

For the present she could make no decision ; ultimately what was best for her son would turn the balance.

Then she lived over again in imagination the last two years, recalling the unceasing, watchful, silent devotion which had been lavished upon her, the strength of Stephen's self-control, which had so successfully masked every symptom of the passionate love that glowed in his heart. What an Eden his companionship would make of her future ! Little by little the sweetness of this outlook grew overcast ; gradually the bitter conviction grew upon her heart that another and a darker destiny awaited her.

Meantime Ferrars' frequent letters were always addressed to General Granard. This Claire understood. He could not have written to her without using expressions which she might not like a third party to see.

At last, after nearly a fortnight's absence, Ferrars returned somewhat unexpectedly.

"Good heavens, Claire, how ill you look !" was his first irrepressible exclamation.

"Yes, don't she ? Ghastly, by Jove !" cried the general. "Just fretting herself to fiddle-strings."

"You look ill enough yourself, Stephen," said Claire, with a faint smile. "You have had a trying time."

"Awfully trying," replied Ferrars, sitting down with a heavy sigh. "He is a total wreck, and utterly despairing. Of course the doctors and all those round him try to encourage his belief in ultimate recovery, but he must know it is impossible. For a man like de Walden a more horrible fate could not be imagined." He paused abruptly.

Claire bent forward and covered her face with her hands.

"A frightful business," ejaculated the general.

"He is very irritable, as you may imagine," resumed Ferrars, "and sometimes a good deal confused—I mean mentally. He liked to have me with him, poor fellow. My God ! what a time it has been !" he burst out in a tone of agony that told Claire all that was in his heart. She looked up and met his eyes with a glance expressive of the sorrow and sympathy filling her soul.

"What has brought me back," Ferrars went on, "is that yesterday for the first time he asked for the boy. Is Gerald here?"

"No. I sent him back to school when I found that life was likely to be prolonged. It was too melancholy for him."

"He first seemed to remember his son yesterday morning, and since he has begged me several times to send for him. Last night he said, with hesitation, 'Do you think Claire would come with him? If I were sure of dying I would ask to see her again, but as I am——' Then he broke off, and called out, as he has done before, 'Ferrars, if you had a spark of humanity you would give me a dose of chloroform that would deliver me from this death in life.' I tried to quiet him, and when he recovered he said: 'I want the boy awfully. I want to see him every day; but I don't want to part him from his mother.'"

"I understand," said Claire. Then she paused, rose up, and going over to her father laid her hand upon his shoulder, as if seeking support. "I understand. I will take the boy to see his father." A long shiver passed through her, and she grew whiter than a moment before it seemed possible she could.

"Think of what you are saying," cried the general. "If you go——"

Ferrars did not speak. He gazed at her with such wild, distressed eyes that she could scarce restrain a cry of anguish, while a grey, death-like hue stole over his face.

"I have thought of much," she returned in tremulous tones, "but I must go. It will perhaps render divorce impossible, but I am not bound to pass my life with the man who was my husband. He may not wish it."

"You are destroying all chance of future happiness," said Ferrars, too deeply moved to conceal his feelings. "General Granard, speak to her. Implore her not to commit herself to the dreadful life she risks. You cannot conceive anything more appalling than the impotent furies of that wretched man—his language, his——"

"I am not bound to stay with him," repeated Claire gently, "and I certainly will not, unless he asks me; but the idea of suing for a divorce must be abandoned. What woman of feeling with any self-respect could attack a man so cruelly laid low? I will send for Gerald, and go to Castle Dormer, to the Grange, to-morrow."

"Pray do you wish *me* to escort you?" asked Ferrars, with unutterable bitterness.

"My brother is coming to-day. He—I——" began Claire in a faint voice, then she stretched out her hand, wavered, and would have fallen had not Ferrars caught her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DIE IS CAST.

THE mental strain to which Claire, in spite of her courage, at length succumbed, rendered her physically unfit for the journey and the dreaded interview with her husband. At her particular request, however, her brother undertook the guardianship of Gerald during a visit to his father.

Ferrars, too, seemed like the ghost of his former self. He haunted General Granard's abode while the attack of low fever, which was the visible result of all Claire had endured, kept her in her room. Even the tough old soldier was touched by his broken aspect, and repeated many times a day, "It's a bad business—a deuced bad business."

Though prudently and profoundly silent as regarded his impressions, he had a sincere conviction that as soon as the divorce was settled, and a decent time had elapsed, Claire would exchange her loneliness for the companionship of a wealthy well-placed husband in Stephen Ferrars. There never was anything so unfortunate as that unlucky spill. Still, as things stood, Ferrars must not excite remarks by his hang-dog looks. He might still be very useful to Claire when her poor old father was gone, and any whisper of scandal would cut her off so powerful an ally. Then that unfortunate husband of hers couldn't live for ever; indeed, from a humane and religious point of view, the sooner he was released from his sufferings the better.

The result of these cogitations was soon seen in the veteran's conversation.

"Yes, Claire is a good deal better to-day. Last night was the best she has had. By George! it's time she began to pick up, or there would be nothing of her left," he said one morning, when Ferrars came in as usual, and, after the customary queries, sat down in mournful silence.

"When do you think she will be able to leave her room?"

"She talks of dining with me to-morrow. Look here, Ferrars, I only wonder you are not in the doctor's hands yourself. I wish

you'd try and pull yourself together ; any one with half an eye could see that you are breaking your heart over what can't be helped. I am not so blind as to misunderstand you, and 'pon my soul I feel with and for you from the bottom of my heart ; but what can't be cured must be endured, so try and put a good face upon it. If the fellows at the club and people in general see you going about as if you were on your way to the gallows, they'll not set it down to sorrow for the sufferings of that scamp de Walden, not they. They'll hit the right nail on the head, trust them."

"Why do you say this ?" asked Ferrars, with languid curiosity.

"Because I do not want a breath of scandal to come between you and my poor child. It would diminish your power to be a useful friend, and she will want a friend hereafter. She never thinks of you except as a more sensible capable brother than Willie. She is one of those soft womanly women who would never dream of love if a fellow didn't put it into her head, and so much the better. So you must do all the prudence. After all, poor de Walden's life isn't worth a couple of years' purchase, you know."

"You are right, general," said Ferrars, with a slight smile at the old man's view of his daughter's character. "I am contemptibly weak ; you have made me ashamed of myself. I will try and act on your advice ; but let us drop the subject."

"By all means ! My son started off home this morning. I hadn't time for a good talk with him till last night. It seems when Gerald was taken into his father's room he did not believe it was the same father he had seen some six weeks ago. De Walden was overcome at seeing him, and he was only allowed to stay a few moments at a time, but the father was always sending for him, and enjoyed the boy's prattle about school and Germany ; he had awful bad nights after, it seems—de Walden, I mean ! Paton has been down again. He doesn't give the slightest hope that the poor fellow will ever be able to move without assistance. It seems there is some displacement of the dorsal vertebræ. Awful look-out for so young a man as de Walden ! Gad ! it does not bear thinking about."

"Have you any idea what Claire will do ?" asked Ferrars, rising and walking to the fireplace, where he leant his shoulder against the mantelpiece, with his back to the light.

"Well, no, not exactly, but I have a shrewd idea. My son told me he would return soon, for he was sure that Claire ought to go to her husband, and he would like to escort her. If de Walden asked for her I am sure she would go—but suppose he does not want her?"

"He expressed no wish to see her when I was with him."

"Well, we'll see; time will show. If she goes to him, I do not see how she can leave him again."

"Yes, we must have patience. I must say good morning, general; I may look in this evening."

"He is desperately hard hit," thought the general, as the door closed on his visitor, "but he'll put a better face on it, now I have warned him."

* * * * *

The summons Claire waited for, and dreaded, came at last. Lord de Walden had had some bad nights, which greatly reduced him, and he began to think, indeed to hope, that his deliverance was near at hand.

A more miserable man, as he lay on his bed of suffering, could hardly be imagined. Physically, the bruises and strain of his terrible fall caused severe pain, but the worst of his injuries, from which there was no hope of recovery, was comparatively painless. It was an effort to him to speak, but he could not resist or evade the stream of bitter thought that would pour itself through his brain,—his overwhelming passion for the woman who had deserted him, the sacrifice of all that ought to be most precious to a man of honour or principle to win her, the joy of the first days, nay months of their life together, the uneasiness, the growing dissatisfaction with himself, the difficulty of pleasing his exacting companion, the last degradation of his miserable credulity in taking Dalton for a familiar friend, his blind imbecility to the real game being played under his very eyes, and then the stony-hearted cruelty of the tremendous blow dealt by the hand that was wont to caress him. His mistress had indeed avenged his wife. The coolness, the deliberation, the skill with which her plans were laid, the escape from all possible pursuit by the immediate embarkation of the offenders—it was devilishly well planned. For this cold-hearted fiend he had sacrificed wife and child and home! Such was the mingled tide of thought which racked and tormented him far beyond his bodily pains. Thus

depressed and reduced, believing he had but a short time to live, he asked the doctor to write requesting a visit from Lady de Walden.

It was a dull, bleak day when Claire set forth on her melancholy errand. There was no time to send for her brother, as she wished to start at once, the accounts of de Walden being very bad. Her father, however, insisted on accompanying her. The tragic course of events had drawn the old soldier a good deal out of himself and into temporary forgetfulness of his own comforts.

It was a journey never to be forgotten. The one sustaining principle in Claire's mind was profoundest pity. Under its softening influence she could bear to see her husband, and was relieved from the mingled contempt and repulsion which had made the idea of meeting him so intolerable.

The house hired by de Walden was of moderate size, and the grounds surrounding it had to the general's eye a somewhat neglected look.

He was however thankful to get his daughter into the shelter and repose of a quiet room, for she was much exhausted.

"Lord de Walden is much better to-day," said the doctor, who awaited their arrival, "and had been looking so anxiously for her ladyship that he (the doctor) would advise the interview should take place as soon as possible, as the anticipation was creating a degree of fever which——"

"I must insist on Lady de Walden taking rest and refreshment before she ventures on so severe a trial," interrupted the general sternly.

"I shall be quite ready in half-an-hour," said Claire with decision. "I am as anxious for the meeting as Lord de Walden can be."

Before that time had expired, the doctor warned de Walden that his wife was coming. Then he beckoned her from the ante-room and whispering that he and the nurse would wait there, to answer any summons, closed the door.

De Walden lay on a curtainless bed, and the large room being well lighted, Claire could see at once the pallor, the look of suffering in his altered countenance. One side of his head was strapped with bands of plaister and one thin, bony hand lay outside the counterpane. He was partially raised with pillows and his eyes were downcast as if he were too weak or too confused to

look up. Claire walked softly but firmly to the bedside, and fixing her eyes mournfully on him seemed to compel him to return the look. For a minute the eternally severed pair gazed into each other's eyes. To Claire no words would come. What could she say? How could she express the sorrow and compassion welling up from her heart for the crushed, ruined creature lying there so helplessly?

"You are very good to come," said de Walden at last, in a low, hoarse voice.

"Oh! how grieved I am for you. I fear you suffer terribly," she exclaimed, while the irrepressible tears would rise and hang on her long lashes.

"The pain is nothing," he murmured, flushing a deep red at the sound of her voice, so long unheard. "It is thinking that kills me." Claire was silent; then, seeing the poor hand which lay outside twitching nervously, she remembered that he had made no movement to offer it, and with a kindly impulse took it in both her own.

"Claire!" exclaimed de Walden, "can you ever forgive? Can you ever forget?"

"I never forget, Guy, that the six happiest years of my life were due to you; I do not wish to remember anything else. If I can be of use to you, I will." She had not called him Guy, even in her thoughts, since he had rejected all her overtures.

Weak as he was, his hand closed firmly on hers. "If I live, and I hope I shall not, you can do more for me than any one else—you have the power and the right to take our boy. If you stay with me he can stay too. I can return to Beaumont Royal if you will come with me and make a home for him. I do not think I shall trouble you long. No one else can do so much for me—will you?"

Claire, leaving her hand in his grasp, gave one swift glance back to the subtle sweetness that flecked the past two troubled years, to the delicious hope which had begun to dawn upon the future; then, with an act of renunciation as great as that of any cloistered nun who has cut herself adrift from the tender ties of home, and friends, and kindred, she said simply and readily: "I will, Guy."

The pale, ghastly face brightened.

"Thank you," he said, with a feeble smile. "There's no use

talking about the past, but—I am grateful. How thin and ill you look, Claire."

"I have had a great shock," she murmured. Then she felt faint and dizzy; half unconsciously she sank into a chair which stood by the bedside, while her husband began to talk of Gerald. What a great boy he had grown, and how bright and companionable. "He has your eyes, Claire," was the only sentence which showed that he associated the mother with the son.

"I think—I must go and lie down, Guy," she said at last. "I have been on the sick list, you know."

"Yes, of course. I ought not to have kept you. But, Claire, you will not go yet awhile? You will not go away to-morrow?"

"Not if you wish me to stay."

"Thank you. Call nurse, and go—go and lie down. You might come again in the evening, when you have rested."

And Claire escaped.

For the first time since the days of her childhood she relieved her full heart by a flood of tears, wept in her father's arms. So she entered into her bondage, her chains more firmly riveted than ever, and when after a second, but short, interview with her husband, she retired—not to sleep—the cry of her heart through the silent night watches was, "Stephen, who will console you? My fidelity to *him* is treachery to you. Can I ever atone to you?"

General Granard returned to town next day alone. De Walden never mentioned him, and the veteran, not unnaturally, shrank from seeing his son-in-law.

He seemed much exhausted, Stubbs told Mrs. Gregg, "Not even up to damning a chap." Such a mark of distress deeply afflicted the sympathetic housekeeper. "Lord, Mr. Stubbs," she said, "where's the use of rank and riches? People may be bad off in spite of them."

The general lost no time in communicating with Ferrars; and a few days after he received a few lines from Claire herself. "I owe you and myself the fullest explanation. Meet me on Tuesday next at Palace Mansions, I shall be in town on Monday. We hope to return to Beaumont Royal as soon as things can be arranged; from this you will understand much."

Ferrars *did* understand that his fate was sealed; yet, for precious moments of illusion, he let himself hope that some side

issue of hope might open from the black cavern-mouth of despair, into the jaws of which Fate was driving him.

For the few days Claire remained with her husband she gave him as much of her company as was advisable, but instead of growing accustomed to her presence, a sort of embarrassment and reserve seemed to grow upon him, and the only topic on which they conversed unrestrainedly was—Gerald.

As Lord de Walden was eager to return to Beaumont Royal, Claire got leave of absence in order to make arrangements, and with a sense of relief of which she felt ashamed.

The sight of her maimed and helpless husband was an infinite distress, and the effort to be companionable and cheering only showed her the depth and breadth of the gulf which yawned between them.

To her meeting with Ferrars she looked forward with dread and a sure presentiment of intense pain, yet to see him once more was a certain compensation. She did not know how dear he had grown until she had to face this terrible parting.

The pretty, pleasant drawing-room was vacant when Ferrars was shown into it, but before he had time to grow impatient, Claire came in quickly, then paused and stood silent.

Ferrars drew near and, taking her cold, trembling hand, exclaimed in a low harsh tone: "So you are going to forsake me, Claire?"

"Have I any choice?" she said, raising her eyes to his, such wistful pleading eyes. "Have you thought, Stephen, how I am placed? Could I possibly seek divorce from a helpless, hopeless, broken man? What would my son think of me hereafter, when he found his father left to hirelings, and his mother enjoying a sunny happy life? Not that I could *ever* enjoy any life when the husband of my youth was desolate and suffering. Do not make things harder for me than they need be. I can scarcely face the existence that is before me."

"I am a selfish brute to reproach you, my love, my own; but I too have a cruel life before me, destitute of all that has given life its charms." He let her go, and throwing himself into a chair covered his face with his hands. Claire kept silent, unable to trust herself with words.

"I am weaker than you are," exclaimed Ferrars, starting up. "But you cannot know what it is to love as I do—the passion, the tenacity with which my heart has clung to you for years."

"Yet I love you well, Stephen," she said, with a sweet earnestness which sent her words to his heart.

"To believe it is the only comfort that can reach me. Will you always love me?"

She smiled. "I think so, Stephen, you are like a part of myself."

He drew a chair for her, and as she sank into it walked once to and fro, as if striving to master his emotion.

"It is base and cowardly to add to your sorrow," he exclaimed, pausing opposite her. "Yes, Claire, I see how difficult, nay, impossible it would be for you to do differently, to adopt any line save the one you have chosen. But, my God! why are you—blameless, innocent as you are, to suffer so cruelly both from the guilt of another and the retribution that has fallen upon him?"

"Do you believe in punishments and retribution, Stephen? I cannot. I only feel we are under inexorable laws which as yet we cannot understand."

"I picture all that lies before you, the loneliness, the seclusion, the constant care of a most troublesome invalid. How shall you live through it? And I must not help you."

"No! you must not. Indeed I can bear all this better alone. If you would help me, try to be happy. To think that I have spoiled your life is the bitterest pang of all. May I tell you what I should like you to do—that is, if it is not inconvenient to you?"

"You know you have but to speak; the only bit of pleasure I can know is to do your bidding." He leant on a high chair near her, grasping the carved back with nervous tension.

"Then, when we go to Beaumont Royal, leave England for a while. It will seem strange to those who know your near kinship, your old intimacy with de Walden, that you should not be with us as you used. You must *not* come, dear Stephen."

"No, I must not," he said bitterly.

"Then," she continued, "people will forget about us all; and you have your new property to occupy you. We must be brave, Stephen, we must!" and with these words she broke down, and wept silently for a few minutes. Presently she spoke.

"I dread returning to Beaumont Royal—and how I loved it once! *Now* it will be like living beside an open grave. All the familiar faces gone, our old servants are scattered and I shall have to find new ones. It can never be the same again."

"And Gerald?" asked Ferrars.

"He comes to us at midsummer, and will remain for the present. I shall get him a tutor."

"And must I never write to you, Claire?"

"Never!" she said with decision. "It is wiser, better not to write, but through my father I can hear of you sometimes."

Some further talk of probabilities and plans, then Claire, growing even whiter than she was before, said, "Stephen, every moment you stay makes parting more painful; you must leave me."

"Is this our real parting?" he exclaimed.

"It must be," she returned. "Circumstances may oblige us to meet once or twice before I leave London, but it will only be in the presence of others. No! I could not live through such a parting again."

"Ah! Claire, you brave, delicate darling, whom I would fain shield from everything harsh or rough, I dread the future for you; it will be beyond your strength."

"No, Stephen, it is inevitable, and what is inevitable can be borne. Then the sight of my unfortunate husband fills me with such compassion. Think of the pain, the dulness, the humiliation! I shall be glad to help him. If—if only I could know that *you* were not unhappy, I could bear anything."

"Then for your sake I will try to be less miserable. So good-bye, Claire! good-bye to all that is worth living for. Dearest, give me one kiss, as you would kiss a dying man from whom the shackles of earth were falling away." He held out his arms.

Claire, with a sudden, irresistible impulse, threw herself into them, and clung to him; one long, tender, despairing embrace, then they tore themselves apart, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE END.

LET us lift the curtain for a last view of the chief actors in this little drama, before we write "Finis" on its concluding page—finis so far as it can be written on any human history over whose *dramatis personæ* the grave has not closed.

So long as to-morrow may be looked for, who can foresee what that morrow may bring, of unexpected gladness, or profoundest grief?

The sun was shining over the woods of Beaumont Royal one splendid golden day in September, when nature seemed to have touched the summit of its richest prime,

"Before decay's effacing fingers,
Had swept the lines where beauty lingers ;"

before the next shower, the next gale, scattered the gloriously tinted foliage, and destroyed the ripe loveliness, not to be again seen till another year had completed its death and resurrection.

* * * * *

Two pedestrians, who from their dusty shoes seemed to have walked some considerable distance, paused as they reached a turn in the path leading from the high road across a corner of the moorland which, it may be remembered, bounded the Beaumont Royal domains on the west, to a small gate which admitted to the grounds.

"What a glorious day," said Ferrars, who was one of them. "I never saw the country look better. This is, I think, the finest view of the old tower and the place."

"It is, sir," said his companion, a stout, broad-shouldered, farmer-like man, dressed in a homely, comfortable fashion, and might be a bailiff or steward. "It has been a fine season altogether. The harvest is the best we have had for three years, and we got it in well. I think you will be able to tell my lord that things are in pretty good order."

"Yes, Davidson ; I have rarely seen them look so well."

"You see, sir, her ladyship takes a great interest in the farm, and has a way of putting us on our mettle. When the young master succeeds, he'll find a rare lot more money and stock than my lord would have left. Ah ! it's a cruel pity to think such a fine gentleman and a good master should be struck helpless as he is."

"It is ; a real tragedy ; fortunately, he does not suffer much pain. Tell me, who has my old place, The Lodge, now ?"

"Squire Upton's eldest son, sir. He married a rich lady from London, and she do ride well to hounds. I can't say I like to see it."

Ferrars made no answer, and his companion went on—"As you'd know your way pretty well blindfold, sir, I think I'll leave

you here. I have to see a man from Blancheſter about ſome Herefordſhires he wants to buy."

"All right. Good morning, Davidson ; glad to ſee every one and everything looking ſo well."

"Thank you, ſir. Good afternoon to you," and the ſteward turned back, deſcending the hill.

Ferrars raiſed his hat to replace it more over his eyes, for the light was ſtrong. He looked older, darker, and more gaunt than formerly and his black hair was touched with grey. He ſtood ſtill for another minute or two, gazing at the wooded upland on his left and the rich plain which lay below. "Five years—nearly five years ago it muſt be," he murmured half aloud as he began to walk ſlowly on towards Beaumont Woods.

"It was juſt about here that ſhe hinted at her poſſible devotion to myſelf." How vividly he recalled his walk and converſation with Mrs. Repton on the day he had eſcorted her back to The Grange ; every ſcene and act of that diſaſtrous period came out from the dark chambers of memory as freshly coloured as if regiſtered there but yeſterday. Could he have ſtopped de Walden on his downward courſe ? he aſked himſelf. No ; none could ſtop him, was the honeſt reply of his judgment ; but a "ſtill ſmall voice" added, "You could not, *even* if you had tried your beſt, which you did not ;" and Ferrars, alone in the clear ſunſhine, felt a pang of ſelf-conviction. No ; he had *not* done his beſt. He had too ſoon decided the caſe a hopeleſs one, and he was not a fair judge. Knowing his couſin as he did, feeling ſo certain that, given temptation, de Walden was ſure to fall into it, though he ſcarcely anticipated ſuch a rapid declenſion, it was hard—it was impoſſible to turn from the chance of paradise ſo unexpectedly offered to him. By the time Mrs. Repton appeared upon the ſcene, he—Ferrars—had learned to love his couſin's wife ſo utterly that he would have done anything, everything, to inſure her companionship for life, and this paſſionate deſire *had* influenced him. Yet, ſuppoſe he had counſelled Claire to open a battery of tears and reproaches on her huſband, inſtead of enduring his altered manners with apparent compoſure and cheerfulneſs, would it not have only haſtened the catastrophe ? He might have ſhown de Walden Mrs. Repton's true character by ſeeming to ſeek her himſelf ; but that would have been too blackguard a trick. Yet in viſiting her in London, though theſe

visits were suggested by some kind of unconscious cerebration, did he not lend himself to her schemes? This was, however, an involuntary action on his part, and, perhaps, in the curious balance of possibilities, did not count for much. No; whatever he might have done—whatever he might have left undone, was of little value, of small importance in the tremendous sum total of cause and effect; but in his innermost soul he knew he had not worked with unstinted loyalty to save her husband for Claire, and the deep-lying vein of superstition, which streaks almost every nature that is not absolutely adamant in its reasonableness, prompted the thought, "Had I been honest right through, should I have endured such signal defeat by the most unexpected catastrophe of de Walden's fatal fall? This is of small consequence. If I could have saved Claire one pang, one tear, and if I failed through my own selfishness to do so, I deserve the deepest damnation; but I scarcely knew what true love meant till waiting and watching for her through those precious years taught me, and, my God! to what end!" These and other reflections of the same nature wrung his heart as he walked with gradually increasing speed through the fair beech woods and across the pleasure grounds to the house. In the hall, as he was wiping the dust from his feet, the butler approached, saying, "My lord has asked for you, sir."

"Very well," returned Ferrars, following that functionary towards Lord de Walden's apartments, before entering which the butler paused and added: "Her ladyship desired me to say that you will find her in the library, sir." Ferrars bent his head and stopped a moment on the threshold to collect himself for, what was infinitely painful and unpleasant to him, an interview with his disabled kinsman.

In the library, a delightful room, once Lady de Walden's favourite apartment, she sat at her writing-table near one of the windows which on one side overlooked a terrace with a mass of variegated foliage below, and lower still the rich plain dominated by the heights of Beaumont Royal.

She had been busy, for a number of letters addressed and ready for the post lay on the table. Claire had laid down her pen and leant back in her chair as if in the profoundest thought. Presently she rose and walked to the centre window. It projected in a small bay from which steps led to the terrace. Here she

stood gazing at the fair scene spread out before her. She was slighter, graver, older-looking than formerly, but her natural air of delicate dignity was even more marked than before, and an expression of quiet resolution had replaced the dreaminess that used to haunt her large sad eyes. What a host of memories thronged her brain as they rested on the fair domain of her husband. How far away those bright early days seemed, when Beaumont Royal was an earthly paradise, her husband a tower of strength, a rock of reliance, flecked with the gold of tenderest affection, and life spread out before her like a velvety green pasture-land bedecked with fairest blossoms of home affection and sweet security. Between that beloved past and the grey chill present a deep, fierce, turbid stream of cruel experience rolled, which no mental engineering could span with any bridge that would link the two periods.

She stood long thus, the melancholy on her brow deepening as she gazed ; then a faint pink began to steal over her cheek as she heard through the open door the sound of approaching footsteps. The next moment Ferrars entered and approached her. She turned and their eyes met. There was a moment's silence, then Claire asked : "How do you think he is to-day?"

"He seems just the same as he was yesterday, a little more—more irritable, and has perhaps more of that nervous twitching which distresses the looker-on more than the sufferer, I fancy. He is an awful wreck." Claire bent her head and her eyes filled with tears.

"I am very glad to have this chance of speaking with you alone," resumed Ferrars. "I want to tell you some provisions of this new will respecting which de Walden wished to consult me. I imagine Gould suggested it, for I do not think de Walden seems capable of originating much. Besides your dower, he leaves you a large legacy ; he names you joint executrix with myself, and sole guardian of your son ; in short, you will have very large powers. There are various small legacies ; the only considerable one is to Mrs. Trevor, de Walden's half-sister. All these seem right enough. I am to take the draft of the will back with me and direct Gould to have it completed and sent down here for signature as soon as possible." He paused, and Lady de Walden making no reply, Ferrars continued :

"I hope this is satisfactory to you, Claire. I am glad he has done what justice he could."

"Yes, I am glad that Gerald will be all my own," said Lady de Walden with a quick sigh. "I never thought about it, but it would have been painful had any one else been named guardian."

"I was rather startled to find I was to be executor; yet why should de Walden not choose me? He never dreamed——" Ferrars paused abruptly, then drawing nearer, he asked in low deep tones, which vibrated in her heart: "How goes it with you, Claire, after these long years of darkness and endurance?"

"Better than I could have hoped, Stephen," she returned with sad composure, "when we parted *that* day—how long ago?—two years and a half."

"Is that all? What ages it seems! I have done my best to obey you, Claire, in the spirit as well as in the letter; but I could not refuse de Walden's direct request, written by yourself; and you are changed, yet not so much as I feared you would be, by your dreary life. It must be dreary."

"At first it was dreary—terribly dreary," she returned quietly, leaning her head back against the side of the window, where the rich deep red of the velvet curtains showed picturesquely against the pale gold of her hair. "You see, I soon felt it would not do to keep Gerald at home, though it seemed cruel to take him from his father; but poor de Walden spoiled him—would not allow any one to contradict him, so I persuaded him to let the boy go. When *he* left I was indeed alone. I did my best to soothe my poor husband, to make his sad life endurable, and my profound pity helped me. He likes me to read to him, but unfortunately the books he likes are the most trashy sporting novels; the newspapers, too, amuse him. Then he is so marvellously pleased or irritated about little matters; his mind seems dwindling down to the limit of the narrow space in which he lives. It is almost better so; when he was brighter he used to have such awful fits of despair and fury about his own helplessness, it was dreadful to be near him," she shuddered.

"He must be overcome with the sense of your goodness."

"Yes," she returned hesitatingly; "I believe he depends on me a good deal and feels I am of use; but, Stephen, he has not a spark of love for me; indeed, do what I can, be as tender as I can, he always gives me the idea of dreading me, and yet I feel for him—oh! so keenly." She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and her bosom heaved with the sobs she strove to suppress.

"My God! is this possible?" muttered Ferrars.

"In some ways it is an advantage," continued Claire when she had recovered her voice, "for I can generally control him when he grows too unreasonable; but what love he has is centred in Gerald, and if he ever thinks of business it is to ask me to make sure no one cheats us in any way, that the boy may get the property unencumbered. That was the reason he wanted you to walk over the farm with Davidson." She paused, and resumed in a lower tone, "More than once, when poor de Walden has dropped asleep and I sat watching him, he has murmured *her* name. It startled me at first, but as something quite apart from myself. Once he said quite clearly: 'Why, Eva, why?' Believe me, he pines for that woman; she had somehow fastened upon his heart in a way *I* could not."

"His heart!" repeated Ferrars scornfully. "I wonder what arrangement has been supplied to him, instead of the organ we call heart, in the sense of feeling?"

"How can we tell?" said Lady de Walden sadly. "We can never be just until we *know*, with a knowledge unattainable in our present state."

"Yours *must* be a hard life," exclaimed Ferrars, looking into her eyes with infinite pity.

"Not so bad, Stephen; now at least. Habit is so strong, and by degrees I have become a very busy woman—everything goes through my hands—and I have not too much time to think. Then Gerald's holidays are gleams of sunshine; this, and a profound sense of the inevitable, have brought me resignation."

"Gerald is a fine boy; all your heart can wish, Claire. He is to meet me at the station and say good-bye. You must let him come and pay me a visit, only it is perhaps selfish in me to ask."

"Yes, he shall go. I should like it. Sometimes Mr. and Mrs. Norris—you remember Lill Sandys—pay me a visit, when he has a week or two of holidays; that always does me good. They are very happy, and Lill has made a decided success since she exhibited that likeness of yours. Mrs. Stepney comes, too, occasionally; I am very fond of her. Now, Stephen, tell me of yourself; tell me you are not unhappy?" and she raised her eyes to his—they were full of tears.

"I, too, find work a help and a consolation," he returned. "When the blow fell that destroyed my life for the time being, I

rushed away as you know, and travelled in strange places, seeking rest and finding none. Then I came back to my desolate home ; now I am busy reclaiming waste land and trying to humanize the cottagers on my property. I have, it is true, intervals of awful heart-hunger ; but if *you* can bear your life, I must be man enough to endure mine."

"Stephen," said Claire, "I have a stay, a hope ; you have not. I have a son. Ah, if I could only know *you* were happy, I could be even content ; I could almost say—Ah, no, I *cannot* say, forget me."

"It would be useless if you did. Poor de Walden asked me to return and visit you both sometimes. I promised nothing distinct. How could I come to eat a man's salt," cried Ferrars with sudden energy, "when I wish him dead and in his grave, that I might clasp his wife to my heart and make her my own for ever ?"

"Hush !" whispered Claire, lifting one hand in warning and growing very white.

"You are right," he said after a short embarrassed pause. "We must keep apart ; I am not sufficiently master of myself." He walked to the writing-table and took up a photograph of Lord de Walden which stood on it.

"The carriage is at the door, sir," said the butler ; "but there is plenty of time."

"I will come directly," returned Ferrars, laying down the picture.

"One curious bit of information came to me somewhat unexpectedly. I was in town about three months ago, and meeting Mrs. Tremaine, I asked where she was going ; she said, 'To a charity concert at that rich Australian's, Mr. Dalton, in Park Lane ; his wife is such a handsome woman, and quite well-bred ; she is very much admired.' My answer was to explain her identity. Mrs. Tremaine was infinitely shocked, and did not go. Nevertheless, brass, beauty and a bounteous husband will carry Mrs. Dalton over the bar and into the haven of London society."

"It may be so, but it does not concern me."

"No, Claire ; you are far away out of the reach of these toilers in the mud and pitch of such social struggles."

"Stephen, will you write to Gerald sometimes ?" said Claire as if she had not heard his last words.

"I will do anything you desire."

"And *whatever* step you think will tend to your happiness, Stephen, take it ; *I* shall be the happier."

"It must be good-bye, then, Claire?"

"It must ; a long good-bye. God be with you, and keep you."

A close hand-clasp, a lingering look into each other's eyes, and Ferrars left her.

As the sound of retreating wheels came to her ears, Claire walked to the writing-table and sat down, leaning her elbow on it and her cheek on her hand, while she gazed upon her husband's portrait ; and large tears coursed slowly down, dropping on her slender hand and wrist. What sweet and bitter thoughts chased each other through the many windings of memory. What earnest resolutions formed themselves, to be brave and resigned.

How long she sat thus she could not tell, but a voice she loved recalled her. "Mother, why, mother dear, you are crying," and a sweet boyish mouth was pressed to hers ; "you, who never cry ! Is my father worse ?"

"No, Gerald ; but looking back makes me sad."

"I wish I could prevent you from looking back ; you are the dearest mother any boy ever had, and I can't bear you to shed tears."

"I am never sad when you are with me, my son, my beloved," and she clasped him to her, with a degree of passion she rarely showed. Then recovering herself and wiping away her tears, she said in her usual tone, though it was still unsteady, "Come, dear, let us go to your father ; you can tell him you saw Cousin Ferrars off. You have not been with him all the morning, and your holidays will soon be over."

THE END.

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